

KAK



VILHJALMUR
STEFANSSON
and
VIOLET IRWIN

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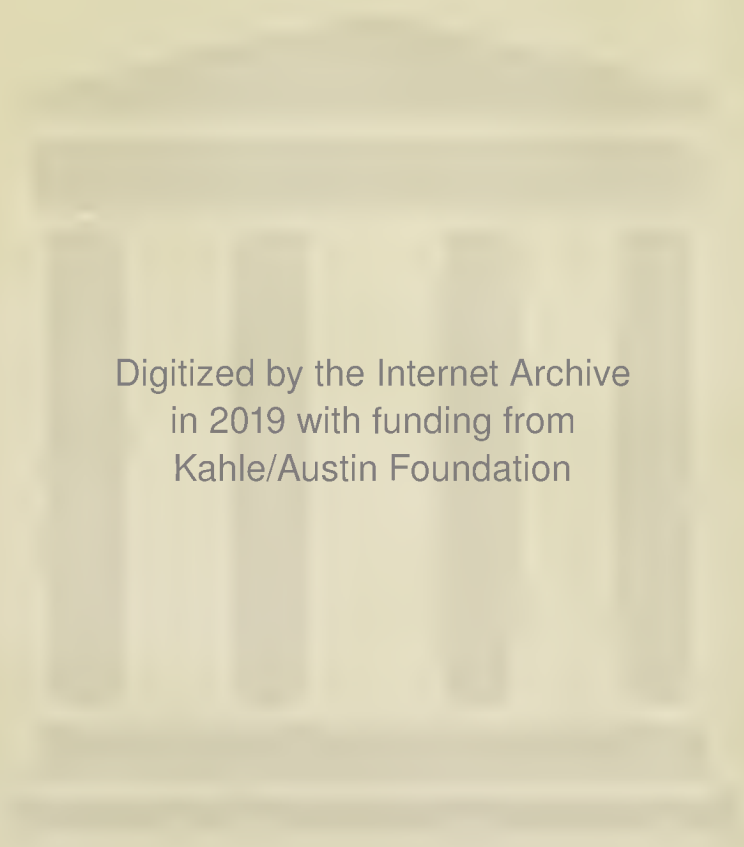


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KAK,
THE COPPER ESKIMO

By
VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON

- My Life with the Eskimo*, 1913
*Anthropological Papers (American Museum
of Natural History)*, 1914
The Friendly Arctic, 1921
Hunters of the Great North, 1922
The Northward Course of Empire, 1922
The Adventure of Wrangel Island, 1925
My Life with the Eskimos (abridged), 1927
The Standardization of Error, 1927
Adventures in Error, 1936
The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher, 1938
Unsolved Mysteries of the Arctic, 1938

1

BOOKS FOR YOUNGER READERS

(In collaboration with VIOLET IRWIN)

- Kak, the Copper Eskimo*, 1924
The Shaman's Revenge, 1925
The Mountain of Jade, 1926

(In collaboration with JULIA SCHWARTZ)

- Northward Ho!* 1925



KAK,
THE COPPER ESKIMO

BY
VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON
AND
VIOLET IRWIN

Illustrated by George Richards

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1940

PS 3537.T2.9K3

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By VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON AND VIOLET IRWIN

Published August, 1924.
Reprinted September,
December, 1924; April,
September, November,
1925; June, 1926;

New Edition June, 1927

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Printed in the United States of America by
THE FERRIS PRINTING COMPANY, NEW YORK

To
CONRAD DE WAAL, JR.

178076

Preface to the Third Edition

CERTAIN things should be said in a preface to the story of "Kak: the Copper Eskimo," as it now stands.

There are a good many ordinary American colloquialisms in the text and there is even some present-day slang. That is because the Eskimo language resembles English in the temporary currency of colloquialisms and in the epidemics of slang that sweep from district to district. Sometimes the origin of an Eskimo slang word is unknown, or it may come from a popular song or from some story. Such expressions as "rubberneck" and "Yes, we have no bananas," should not, in my opinion, be translated literally from our American language into an Eskimo book that we might desire to publish. If that were done the effect would be grotesque and puzzling to the Eskimos. Similarly, it is best to represent Eskimo slang in an English book not by a translation but by the use of our own slang of the time.

In the collaboration on this book Miss Irwin is

Preface

responsible for the story writing, while I am responsible for the facts and incidents, nearly all of which have been gleaned from my book "My Life with the Eskimo," published in 1913, and from my more scientific presentation of the same material in "Anthropological Papers" published by the American Museum of Natural History of New York in 1914. Miss Irwin also had access to my diaries kept during eleven years of residence among the Eskimos.

Unfortunately the book had to go to press while I was absent on a journey to the interior of Australia, and so I did not have an opportunity to read the proofs or to give certain matters final consideration. When I returned two printings had already been circulated. Although there were no serious errors in the book, I have made a few changes in this third printing. Miss Irwin had taken from "My Life with the Eskimo" certain things which are correct for a few individuals only among one or two of the several Copper Eskimo groups; in the present and subsequent printings these are replaced by what is more typical of the majority.

VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON.

New York,

October 16, 1924.

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KAK, THE COPPER ESKIMO

KAK,* THE COPPER ESKIMO

CHAPTER I

The House That Kak Built

KAK was an Eskimo boy who lived in Victoria Island in Canada. He belonged to the Copper Eskimos. This name does not refer in any way to their complexions as "red Indians," but is given because the people make knives and implements out of copper. As far as looks went Kak was quite ordinary—a short, muscular fellow, with brown hair and brown eyes, and a skin only a little darker than a white boy's skin at the end of the summer holidays when it is tanned. But his clothing was very different from ours, being made entirely of fur.

Kak was not counted a poor boy though he possessed very little. Eskimos do not go in for possessions. They are a migratory people, always moving from place to place, and so learn to get on with a small amount of gear, as we do in camp life. Kak was contented and had no cares. He never

*The vowel in *Kak* should be pronounced long, as in *car*.

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had to make up his mind whether to play with his meccano, or his electric train, or his radio. He was entirely ignorant of such things and yet not a bit dull. He found plenty of sport up there in the Arctic to keep him merry and bright. First of all his parents owned so little they were never worried about taking care of things; with nothing to do but kill a few animals for food and fuel and clothes they were as gay as children, always laughing and joking from morning to night. The boy could scarcely remember a day that was not full of fun and laughter.

In the winter they lived in a snow house. You would think it must be cold inside a snow house but it was not, because their large lamp burned in the house all the time and kept it cozy and warm; so warm that Kak usually skinned off his coat and shirt as soon as he came indoors. He did not come in often during the daylight, for he enjoyed the cold outside, and he was a singularly independent lad, doing just what he pleased. That is the Eskimo boys' compensation for not having toys: they are allowed to do as they like. In the morning Kak did not get up till he wanted to. He did not have to wash his neck, nor mind his table manners, nor go to school; and he was never, never sent to bed. You see as there was only one room in the whole

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house the family had to be jolly all together all the time. In the evenings when the grown-up folks sat around telling stories and singing songs, Kak stayed with them, and so did his little sister, Noashak. They sat up as long as they possibly could, and when the sandman came and shut their eyes in spite of them, they toppled over asleep wherever they were, and somebody tucked them in between fur blankets.

Kak, whose name means the top of anything or summit, as of a mountain, was twelve years old when he built his first house by himself. It was a horrible experience which he will remember all his life.

The way to build a snow house is to cut big blocks the shape of dominoes out of a hard snowdrift and set them up on edge in a circle, leaning them inward a little toward the center. You must carve the first block diagonally in half so that its back makes a hill for the second row to run up on; and when you have started properly you can keep on building one row above the next, going up and around like the red and white on a barber pole, and always leaning them inward till they just naturally meet at the top, where you sometimes poke a very small hole for ventilation. The finished dwelling is a beehive of snow—awfully cold snow which has

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frozen together safe and solid in a surprisingly short time. Next you dig a long tunnel through the drift and a hole in the floor of the house, and that is the way you go in and out, like rabbits and foxes burrowing to their dens.

A family will occupy this sort of house only about three weeks; for the heat inside melts the snow walls, and as they cool off somewhat every night they turn gradually to ice, and the house grows colder and colder (for ice is much colder than snow) till the owners decide to have a new one. A few houses are magnificent with windows, ice windows, which being troublesome to make are carefully removed and placed in the next house when it is built. Even if the Eskimos continue to live in the same place they will build a new house every few weeks. When they are too careless to bother about windows, plenty of light filters through the white walls; and while the house is occupied the lamp is always burning brightly inside.

Kak did not live very long in his first house. He spent only one night under its low dome, and felt very glad indeed that he did not have to stay there a second night. The way of it was this:

Taptuna, Kak's father, was going seal hunting with a neighbor. These neighbors, who were the only other people living within ten miles, had used

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up all their supply of blubber. Now blubber is the fat part of seals out of which drips the oil for the lamps, and as the lamp is the Copper Eskimo's only means of warming his house and cooking his food, this was a serious situation. In his need the neighbor came to borrow from Taptuna, and begged him to help hunt seals. Taptuna readily agreed, for he was a kind-hearted man; so they started out early. But seal hunting through the ice is slow and difficult, and the first day they failed to get any. The next morning, however, while crossing a sandspit, they discovered the remains of a dead whale, half buried in drifted snow and earth. It must have been two years old at least, and the bears and other animals had eaten most of the fat; but Taptuna and Hitkoak hoped by cutting off parts of the outside flesh, which would make good enough dog feed, to strike an ample supply of blubber underneath. So they abandoned the hunt and fell on this free gift, eager to get all they could and that at once, for sled tracks in the snow showed other Eskimos knew about the prize.

They worked all day, not stopping to drag the meat home but piling it up chunk on chunk, only to find by evening that some crafty bear had clawed under and scooped away the very store of blubber on

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which they were counting. It meant they must hunt next morning and *must* catch a seal without fail.

Both men hated to waste the heaps of frozen whale flesh which had given them all the work they wanted to hack off with soft copper knives. Copper will not make nearly so sharp a knife as steel. Taptuna and Hitkoak, sweating after their labor, wished they had stopped about noon, harnessed the dogs, and sledded home some of this good food. It was too late now, and to-morrow they must hunt. Oil for the lamps was more necessary than dog feed. Until they killed a seal the neighbor would go on borrowing blubber from Taptuna, and it was already past mid-winter so he had not much left for his own family.

It looked as if their effort over the whale was going to be a dead loss; but the older, wiser man promised to sleep on the question, and next morning, when Guninana was boiling their breakfast, he said:

“Kak, my boy, while I am watching the seal hole to-day, you may harness both dogs to the sled and go to the carcass over yonder and bring home some loads of whale flesh. The young bear I killed will not last forever, eh? And it is well to lay in food while the laying’s good.”

Had Kak been an English or American school-

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boy he would doubtless have mumbled, "All right, dad," and gone on eating his breakfast without giving any visible sign of his thrill. But an Eskimo never learns to disguise his feelings, so Kak grinned all over his round face and cried:

"Bully! Bully! Me for it! Do you hear, Noashak? I'm to drive the team."

And he began to dance and jump about and was so delighted and excited he quickly pulled on his fur shirt and his topcoat of reindeer skin, and dashed out to pat young Sapsuk, his favorite dog, and tell him what a fine day they were going to have together.

His mother gazed fondly on her son's brown head as it disappeared through the hole in the floor.

"Is it not too much for him?" she asked doubtfully. "Will the boy be able to find his way?"

"Yes, he will be able to do it just as well as I. Kak is a smart lad and has plenty of sense; besides, they have only to follow the trail we broke last night."

So Guninana, who thought her tall, active husband the best judge of everything in the world, beamed on him and said no more.

Kak was keeping up a fine game with the dogs. He was so overjoyed he could hardly stand still a minute. This seemed the greatest event in his whole

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life; not only had his father trusted him with a man-sized job for the first time, but it was the very job he loved best. Kak would rather harness both dogs to the light sled and drive like the wind than do anything else in the whole Arctic. He was so proud of his task and so anxious to do it all by himself, that he waited and put off and dilly-dallied about starting till his father had gone. Of course Taptuna observed this, but he understood. He thought: "The boy will be tired anyway when he has fetched two loads, so there is plenty of time."

"Get busy, my lad. Kill meat while the light lasts," he called for farewell, and waving his harpoon toward the already crimsoned horizon, trudged off leading the neighbor's dog.

Kak loitered yet a little gloating over the prospect of his ride. He wanted golden shafts of light bathing yesterday's trail which showed now plain as an open lead. He wanted to be able to tear along. One fast dash to the carcass would more than make up for delay, so he fiddled with the dogs.

"Have you not gone yet?" asked Guninana, surprised, when she came out to examine her bearskin stretched on a frame to dry.

"Just as soon as the sun rises, mother, I'll be away like an arrow. See, I am harnessing now," Kak answered.

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He was, truly. He had begun to hitch each dog to its trace at the first sound of her voice, and kept himself very busy about it.

Like all real boys, Kak did not mind a lot of extra trouble in making play out of his work. It was fun to pretend he must go on a long journey alone; so he went to the tunnel, which also serves as store-house, and taking his father's big snow knife, used to carve out the blocks when building, he bound it securely on to one side of the sled.

"Whatever is that for?" asked Noashak, who was playing with the neighbor girls, running up on top of the house and sliding down its smooth curve. "What is the snow knife for?"

"In case I decide to stop overnight," said Kak, swelling with importance.

"Oh, pooh! Stay all night! Why you are only going to the whale carcass. It is no distance at all! Daddy said you could easily make two trips in daylight."

Kak flushed. "I shall make double that—I shall make four!" he answered, hotly. "Watch me!"

As he spoke the sun's rim peeped above the long flat beach, streaking the blue-gray world with vivid gold. As if at a signal Kak let go of his team and sprang for the sled with a "Yi—yi—yip!" Instantly both dogs bounded forward. They were off!

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The boy shouted, waved his arms, knocked his heels on the sleigh and beat his gloved hands together with resounding thwacks for the sheer pleasure of making a noise, as the two fresh pups raced their shadows over the crusted snow.

It was a wonderful ride to the whale. But once there Kak had to do some hard work handling the big, rough pieces of frozen flesh and piling them on the sled. Perhaps it was not a very large load when he called time and headed the dogs home; still he felt satisfied with himself, and was quite ready to put on airs; and the girls, who had been mightily impressed by his glorious start, rushed to meet his return all clamoring:

“A ride! A ride!”

“No, it is too heavy! We have much meat,” Kak swaggered.

“But I want a ride! I will ride!” whined Noashak, who was a very selfish, naughty little girl, and deserved to be spanked. Now she made her brother angry.

“Hold off there! Get off, I say! The dogs are too tired. They’re panting. Look at Pikalu, how he puffs and blows.”

“That’s your fault! You have run him too fast. I will tell father on you.”

Noashak was not a bit nice in a temper. She

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climbed up the back of the load, and Kak cried to the other girls to pull her down, but they only scampered away laughing; then he had to stop and go around and pull her off himself. She kicked and slapped him and climbed up immediately they started. Kak came and pulled her down again and again; but in the end he had to let her ride because she screamed and yelled so. This sort of welcome, repeated, delayed him a whole lot, yet he had brought his two loads when the far edge of the ice floe dented the sun's gleaming disk; and after that he brought one more. It was good work for a boy. He felt proud of himself and showed it, crowing over the girls.

"You guessed two, eh? And I have got in three!"

"Three! Bah! Three's nothing! You said you could bring four," Noashak jeered.

Now Kak did not like this at all. His male nature wanted to be admired and praised, even if he had accomplished less than he had boasted. Her unkindness made him feel like backing up his good opinion of himself.

"Well, anyway, three's a lot. It's more than dad expected me to bring."

"Four!" bawled his tormentor.

And "Four! Four!" sang the neighbor girls in chorus, going over holus-bolus to his natural enemy.

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"You promised to bring four and you can't do it. You're afraid! You're afraid to go back again now!" adding an Eskimo taunt equivalent to "Cowardy, cowardy custard!"

They flouted him meanly, sticking out their tongues, stretching their mouths with fingers in their cheeks, making faces at him over the housetop.

"Bears!" suddenly yelled Noashak.

That was too much. It hit home.

"I am not afraid!" Kak cried, outraged. "Who says I can't do it?"

He shot a half fearful glance at the sky. Daylight was slowly fading but it would last for a short while, and his dogs looked jolly enough; they had enjoyed more rest than running during their day's work. If he made one grand dash back to the carcass, and only stayed to load ever so little meat, it would count the same.

"I will do it," the boy answered boldly. "Who dares to say I cannot bring four loads? Hi there, Sapsuk! Hok, hok, Pikalu!"

He swung his team around in a wide circle and dashed away without waiting for comment from the astonished girls.

"Kak!" cried his mother from the tunnel entrance. "Kak! It is too late!"

But a breeze had sprung up blowing out of the

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west and whisked her voice in the opposite direction. Anxiously she watched boy, dogs, and sled dwindle to a small, black speck.

"You will come inside now, child," Guninana commanded, ill pleased; and Noashak, humbled by her brother's rash magnificence, and fearful of her own part in it, obeyed. The neighbor girls ran home quickly. All at once the flat snow landscape around the two snow houses lay empty and deserted.

By the time Kak reached the whale a rack of clouds had blown up hastening the night. The earth and sky turned all one dark, cold gray. Those other Eskimos, whom he had found cutting flesh earlier, were gone; and wolves howled distantly gathering for a feed. At their dismal cries Kak suddenly felt afraid. His hands shook so that he could hardly lift the meat. He stopped and peered over his shoulder, trying to see with his bright eyes through the thickening night. He did not care a jot for wolves, they are cowards and will fly from a shout; but Noashak's last mean taunt burned in his mind. If a great white bear were to prowl out of the gloom he knew it would go hard with him and the dogs. His hands stiffened from fright and his skin grew clammy. Another long, lone howl arose inland; it seemed to run right up his spine. Kak fancied he saw a huge yellow blur moving beyond

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the carcass and at that his hair felt as if it were rising under his fur hood. The night turned blacker, the wind sighed icily, and fear overflowed him like water. He dropped a ten-pound chunk of meat from his petrified fingers and sprang for the sleigh calling his dogs:

“Hok! Hok!”

They were wild to be off home. At a single bound the team broke and ran, with Kak racing after them, yelling at the top of his voice to keep his courage up: ‘Yip—yip—yi!’—and mumbling charms his mother had taught him to scare off evil.

The dogs raced faster and faster; the howling of the wolves excited them; the nearly empty sleigh flashed over the hard snow; and a freshening wind behind drove the whole party on. Kak, thrilled by this rush of freedom, soon forgot all his fears. He urged the team with whistle and shout, yipping and yieing like a maniac or a real boy, till suddenly the sled gave a lurch, turned upside down, and sent him flying heels over head across its runners. The dogs, jerked back on their traces, stopped abruptly, and Kak, who was buried neck and arms in a drift before you could say Jack Robinson, picked himself up, dug the snow out of his eyes and mouth, and dusted off his furry clothes.

“Ouch! Bhoo! I say, old Sapsuk, where are we?”

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As if he perfectly understood the question Sapsuk sat down on his bushy tail with his long, red tongue hanging out and his breath coming in heavy pants, while Kak looked about him. They ought to have been very nearly home; but the crazy driver could see no sign of the two little white domes that were his father's house and Hitkoak's. At first he failed to understand. The houses dropping out of sight seemed very odd indeed. Of course dogs and people move about and get lost if you take your eyes off them for five minutes; but a boy hardly expects his home to behave in that ridiculous way. And yet, peering in every direction as far as he could, which was not far on account of the darkness, Kak did not see a sign of a house. Then gradually he began to know it was not home that was lost, but himself and the dogs. His heart sank down, down, down like a stone cast into the sea. He remembered how in his panic to get away, followed by the reckless splendor of the run, he had forgotten all about direction, had left it to the frantic team to keep the trail. Examining the cause of their accident he felt sure there could not be any ice as rough as this lying between the whale carcass on the wind-swept sandspit and Taptuna's home on the bay. They must have gone far past the houses; or maybe dashed off on a wrong line altogether.

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Goodness, how the wind blew, now he tried to stand against it! The thought of returning into its teeth, slowly, painfully, following their own track was enough to make a hero weep. Perhaps they would have to go all the way back to the old whale before they picked up the true course. But Kak did not cry. He laughed. You see he had run right away from his fear: he really did not feel so upset as he should have done over being lost in the middle of an Arctic night. Retracing their steps seemed a perfectly simple and safe way of getting himself out of this scrape—but he counted without the wind. Racing before it none of the living things had guessed its strength. Now it beat upon them like a blizzard. Overhead, the sky hung dark with clouds, and close to the ground, where our boy had to bend to see their trail, the demon air was whirling snow in eddies, gathering up particles as sharp as sand to fling into his eyes. The dogs suffered also; but worse than these discomforts was the storm's effect. Tearing over the open ground, grabbing a handful of snow here and scattering it there, that mighty blast soon hid their track. The farther back they went the less and less distinct it grew, till on the top of a small ice hill they lost it altogether. Poor Kak hunted and hunted, coaxing his team, straining his eyes for a glimpse of the house or the path.

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When he had done every possible thing and quite made up his mind to abandon home, the boy felt relieved. Right down in the bottom of his heart he was not a bit keen about returning to that haunted neighborhood of dead meat. Wolves would have gathered there in numbers by now. Kak shivered. Spending a night in the open at a temperature of thirty-six below zero was not exactly inviting; still, he felt the whale carcass for five minutes would have been far worse. He sat down to think, hunched against the wind. A sealskin had been spread over the rungs forming the top of the sleigh, and when he righted his gear after the upset one piece of meat was found lying under it; the rest had gone spinning across the ice into darkness and he did not bother to hunt them up. Now this ridiculously small load reproached him, for the dogs would be hungry. He remembered dropping that dandy, ten-pound chunk in his crazy fear, and his face burned with shame over such cowardice. What a blessing the girls would never know! Crouching there he recollected wistfully his wrangling with Noashak that day, clear back to its little beginning. Ah! The snow knife!

With a rousing shout Kak leaped to his feet, and cut a caper before turning to unlash the thong holding his bully, big knife.

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"In case I stay all night," he had bravely boasted; so now he must act up to the boast.

"Right here I will build me a house!" the boy chuckled; and walked over the ground, leading the dogs, till he found a drift. To his soft, padding shoes this bank felt solid enough, but he did not dare to build till he had fallen on his knees and tested it by plunging his knife in here and there to make sure the snow was evenly packed.

"Seems all firm," Kak decided, battling to brush the icy particles out of his eyes. With his face to the wind he cut his first blocks and built them up in a circle around where they were cut; each chunk as it came out lowered the floor a little and this helped considerably. But it was tough work for a lad; his short arms could only lift and place small pieces, which meant using ever so many more of them; still, he stuck to it like a man and as he worked the job grew easier for the rising walls of the house soon offered shelter from the cutting wind.

By and by he felt ravenous and called "time" for supper. The dogs, curled up on the snow with their faces buried under their paws, jumped from their sleep and answered, "Here," with tail-wagging expectation. Kak tossed them morsels between bites. He enjoyed his meal of two-year-old whale meat, its gamy flavor was as delicious to his taste as pheasants



IT WAS TOUGH WORK FOR A LAD.

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seem to ours. The boy grew cheerier at every mouthful, and laughed aloud when his favorite snapped fierce jaws on a good bit thrown for Pikalu. Finally he sawed the chunk in halves and let the animals finish it while he finished his work.

Kak's was a very small house. It had no tunnel at all and no proper door—but why have a door when one does not want to go in and out? Kak only wanted to get in. During the building he had been compelled to cut a hole in the lower part of his wall so he could crawl out and get more blocks; for there had not been quite enough material in the floor to finish the roof. When all was ready he scrambled through this small hole, pulled the dogs after him, and then closed it with a block he had cut for that purpose. From the outside the architect had not been able to see all the chinks in his house, but it was so dark inside every least little one showed clearly against the night; so he filled his mitts with soft snow and plastered them up. Then he spread the sealskin from the sleigh over his floor. Now all was shipshape. But without door or window they had no air. The boy made a little round hole in the middle of his door-block, and another in the top of the roof, as he had seen his father do, and at last, feeling utterly safe and tremendously proud of him-

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self, cuddled down with a large woolly beast on either side of him, and was soon fast asleep.

A long drawn thunder, followed by a tumbling, rending, grinding vibration roused Kak from his dreams. He felt cold. It was apt to be chilly at night if the lamp went out, so the boy sought his father's hefty form to snuggle into. Eskimo families all sleep in a row in one big bed, and Kak's place was beside his daddy. Drowsily he threw a hand across to feel for him and rapped Pikalu on the nose. The dog growled. Then his master woke up enough to find himself in his clothes and remembered.

Another rumble, more prolonged, more terrifying than the last, shook the whole house. Kak rose on his elbow and listened. He could hear the wind whistling around their shelter, while the smashing and bumping never ceased. You would have come out all over in goose flesh and popped your head under the blanket; but Kak only turned on his other side and lay up closer to Sapsuk. The row outside was no more alarming to him than taxicabs beneath your window, or a trolley car clanging across rails, for well he knew its meaning; a gale had driven the sea ice in on the landfast ice, and the two floes were grinding and groaning and churning against each other, with bolts of thunder when sometimes a great mass as big as a house toppled over another great

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mass, and vibration like an earthquake as it slid off again. This sort of show was fun to watch in the daytime, and nothing to be afraid of at night when you were safely camped in your own house which you had constructed all by yourself on the solid, landfast ice.

But while the lost boy slept so peacefully his father and mother and sister were very unhappy and anxious.

The seal hunters had returned at dark, each dragging a fine, fat seal and congratulating the other on a good day's work. They parted with jests and laughter outside Hitkoak's place; and Taptuna strode on cheerily to his own home. But before he had got within calling distance he knew something was wrong; even in twilight he missed his sled's black bulk; and where were his dogs? They should have come bounding to welcome him, wagging their tails, asking for friendly pats, jumping up, frisking, romping. Instead of being the center of this lively scene the little white roof of his house humped itself out of the white ground like a solitary tomb.

Taptuna wasted no time on the seal. Letting it lie he strode inside, calling for Kak. Guninana raised an anxious face from over her cooking pot and told the worst:

"He has gone! That wild boy dashed off for one

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last load of whale meat after the sky had turned gray. I called, 'It is too late!' but the dogs were already galloping, the wind blowing—Kak did not hear."

"How long?" demanded Taptuna.

"Long enough to be back now," answered the mother shaking her head. Then she spoke her haunting fear: "There are bears all around and he carried neither spear nor bow."

Guninana was horribly afraid of bears, more afraid of a polar bear than of anything else in the whole world.

Without a word Taptuna turned to go.

"You will eat first?" his wife pleaded, for she knew he had taken only a piece of dried meat since morning.

"I will have a drink of broth."

She hurried to give this to him in a horn cup, saying: "It would be better to eat."

"The wind rises," Taptuna replied, and there was no need for him to say more. Pulling up his hood he disappeared through the low door.

Guninana silently stirred the stew, and Noashak, completely subdued by creeping fear, stole close to her mother's side.

Taptuna crossed to Hitkoak's. He who had so freely given help with the hunting, could now as

The House That Kak Built

freely ask for help. Very soon the neighbor's dogs were harnessed, and both men set out for the whale carcass. The wind was rising. It howled louder and louder, and drove straight into their faces, making the journey as harsh for them as for Kak and his team, who were plodding back in the same direction, a mile or so out on the ice, but hidden by darkness and whirling snow.

At last Taptuna saw the whale bulking black on the sandspit. They hurried on, watching thin shadows slink from its side at the noise of their approach. It was evident wolves had been there in numbers, all the ground around was trampled with their footsteps freshly sunk in the freshly driven snow, but there were no sled tracks at all; therefore the search party knew Kak must have started away before the wind began to blow so fiercely. He must have lost the trail; he might be anywhere. It would be madness to try to follow him through the stormy night.

"We will need luck to get safely home ourselves," Hitkoak said, peering at their own drifted tracks; and Taptuna reluctantly agreed. Nothing could be done till to-morrow; so they turned their backs to the gale and were blown along watching every inch of the way; and shouting—shouting—for the boy might be wandering close at hand.

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

Sadly Kak's father helped tether the dogs, and struggled to his own house. He knew Guninana would have the lamp burning and her meat pot on to boil; but he little expected the cheery manner with which she greeted him. Her face was so many degrees less worried it seemed almost smiling, and her eager words bubbled up like the fragrant bear stew.

"He has the snow knife."

"What do you say?"

"It is all right! Everything's all right! Kak took with him your big knife."

As Taptuna pulled off his great fur coats and hung his mittens near the lamp to dry, Guninana excitedly told of their boy's boast about staying all night. Her telling made the story sound more purposeful than Kak's careless morning play, for Noashak had told it so. The child was weeping for her brother lost in the driving snow, and as she wept and feared, fear led her to remorse. She felt oh, so sorry about their quarrel, and remembering its cause, suddenly the idle threat turned to a promise. Now that Kak did not come back she knew he had really intended staying away. She was awed by his independence; her mother provoked and delighted.

"He is a rash one, is our lad!" chuckled the little

The House That Kak Built

woman, slapping her plump hands on her plump knees.

“Kak has sense,” his father grunted between mouthfuls. “Since he carries the snow knife we needn’t worry about their being cold to-night. Let us go to bed quickly—I am as tired as any man on this earth; and with the first streak of light we must be after him again.”

So the remains of the family went to bed, all three in a row; and Kak’s father was soon snoring; but his mother lay awake a long time, wondering if her little boy really could manage to build a house all by himself. Taptuna said he could—and Taptuna was generally right. Presently she sighed and fell asleep, and the shrieking ice pack troubled her no more than it did Kak, for Guninana was only afraid of bears.

Kak slept late. Excitement and wild driving tire a boy more than he reckons, and he had done a full day’s work with the meat before building his house. So he was not a bit ashamed when he opened one eye to find strong yellow sunshine striking through the dome. He snuggled down again only half conscious of having been disturbed by unexpected noise. It sounded once more—knock, knock, knock. But the boy was dreadfully sleepy.

Knock—knock—knock.

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

This could not be the grinding of ice nor the sob of wind, nor yet a dog's deep breathing. He opened both eyes and lay staring up. A band of darkness danced across the roof. Something was outside—something large and active! The boy gazed dumbly. What kind of an awful critter could it be? His fancy leaped to bears. He lay petrified with fright.

A soft thud followed. The shadow vanished, sunk to a spot. Kak nerved himself to reach for the snow knife, his only weapon. Then a prolonged squeak on a high note riveted his glance on the dark blot. He saw one sharp claw thrust through. It moved rapidly. Having been shocked awake, the boy was still too dazed to comprehend. He thought some ravenous, strange animal must be breaking in on them. He was too scared to scream, to move, even to rouse the dogs, till a lump of snow falling from the roof saved him the trouble. Like a flash Sapsuk sprang to fight Pikalu for the honor of meeting this attack. Panic ensued—a regular good mix-up. The pups barked and scrambled and trod on each other, and nipped and yelped and walked over poor Kak who, crowded under the edge of his house anxiously eyeing the shadow, wished his defenders had been ten times more savage.

It is a wonder they did not knock the place down; for until a snow house has had a fire in it to melt

The House That Kak Built

the inner surface, which quickly freezes from the cold outside, and so forms a hard ice dome, it is a very fragile sort of shelter.

All at once the boy woke up and understood. He laughed at himself, trying to curb the dogs between chuckles. A second later the door-block fell in with a shower of soft snow, and his father's head appeared.

Taptuna joined in the laugh. "Stole a march on you, Kak! Ha-ha! This is a fine house you have built, with no door. Lucky I happened along to dig you out—eh? Down, Sapsuk!"

"Dad!"

Kak leaped up, cracked his head against Pikahr's, and fell on his knees with a howl, rubbing the place. Tears sprang to his eyes. Now that they were safely found, all last night's terrors, which he had so bravely put aside, rushed over him. He was glad of an excuse to cry. Taptuna, still in the doorway, jollied his son and pretended not to notice the tears.

"You sleep so late here you must sleep well—no worries at all? But it was a grand scare you gave us yonder; going off to set up an establishment for yourself without a word of warning. A fine place like this, too!"

"I didn't go off to set up anything," mumbled Kak. "We got lost."

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

"Lost! What? On that plain trail you had traveled all day?"

"I—I thought there was a bear—and we whirled along."

"Ah, you take after your mother."

Kak blushed to the edge of his hood, and who can say how much farther? For Guninana's abject fear of polar bears was a standing joke in the family.

"Help me out! Help me out!" he cried, so as to change the subject.

The dogs began to make a worse row than ever, for the intrushing cold air carried a tantalizing smell of fresh seal meat which Taptuna had brought along. They all looked so funny dashing about inside the funny little house, Kak struggling among his team and trying to talk, while legs, arms, feet, and heads shot in every direction, that his father laughed and laughed and laughed! It would be a pity, he said, to spoil the show by letting them out too soon.

"No, no! Let us out. I want to go home," begged the boy.

"But what about this elegant house? You will not desert it at once?" Taptuna teased.

"Help! Help!" wailed Kak, with a break in his voice.

So his father, seeing he was in earnest, backed away from the door; and immediately the dogs

The House That Kak Built

tumbled out with Kak on top of them, all snowy and furry and glad to be free.

There was frozen fish for a picnic breakfast on the sled, with raw seal for the dogs; and while they all four ate, Taptuna continued jollyng Kak about his new home. The boy did not mind now because he was in the open air and having a good meal. Of course, being Eskimos, they thought frozen fish a dandy breakfast even for a cold morning. Kak ate his up to the last crumb, and it put him in such good humor that he was willing to laugh at his house, and to own the tiny shelter did not look much viewed from outside by critical eyes on a bright, sunny day. To begin with, it was very low—more like a mushroom than a beehive, for the top of the dome had sunk in a little from its own weight and not being properly built; and it was far from round; and far from smooth; and the crooked small blocks sat every which way.

“But it did stand up!” its owner cried defensively. “And it was cozy inside with the dogs, and saved us from the wind and the snow and wolves and bears and being frozen. I had to try to make it!”

“You did well, my son,” said Taptuna, suddenly growing serious. “And the house is very good for a first effort, and in the dark, too. I’m proud of you. Not only because you were able to build a house for

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

yourself, but because you had the right idea in an emergency; the common sense to know what you needed and the pluck to go after it."

When his father praised him Kak felt the tears rush again to his eyes; so all at once he began to be very busy harnessing the dogs.

Now although Taptuna teased about the night's adventure he was really and truly bursting with pride over his clever son. He brought Guninana and Hitkoak, at different times, to see the mushroom. Kak's house became famous. The story of how the boy had weathered that night alone and sheltered his team from the gale was told and retold, till he swaggered like a man on the strength of this great achievement. His mother began to consult him about things instead of issuing orders; while the neighbor girls and Noashak were filled with awe and admiration. They never again dared to make faces or pull mouths at Kak; and never doubted his most gorgeous boast.

CHAPTER II

Kak's Hunting

ONE morning Kak wakened early and lay staring up at the snow ceiling. It looked mysteriously large and gloomed, for Guninana was saving oil and only a small light flamed in one corner of the large lamp, instead of the broad blaze all along its edge. Faint shadows were cast on the incurved roof by the family clothes hanging about. Kak, watching them, peopled an imaginary world with grotesque, half-human forms. The shadows stayed still but his thoughts danced. He was full of big thoughts these days, and flashing ambitions. The superb elation of his all-night adventure had died down somewhat; house building was no longer tirelessly discussed by everybody; the story sank gradually into neglect, and with it our hero's importance. This did not suit Kak. Applause had tickled his vanity. Having once tasted the pleasures of fame he longed for them always, and burned to distinguish himself anew.

The worst of it was, in order to thrill the family now he would have to do something grander and

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

nobler and mightier; and after that excitement wore off—if he did achieve it—another still bigger deed must follow, and so on and so forth until he would be an old, old man. Fame and Romance set a terrific pace! Kak felt strangely small and powerless considering this and watching the shadows. His spirits sank.

It was chilly inside and very quiet; nothing stirred outside. Even the dogs must be asleep. Such uncommon silence offered a truly wonderful opportunity for an Eskimo boy to think; but Kak could not stay long on the job. As soon as he noticed the cold he knew what was making him downhearted; and so, jumping out of bed, he pulled on his fur shirt and boots and trousers, and his rough topcoat, and crept into the tunnel. Contrary to his habit he made no noise. Adventure is ever so much more fun when it leads through stealth and secrecy, as all boys know. Besides he did not want to wake Noashak and have her bawling after him.

Once in the open air he commenced swinging his arms vigorously to make his blood run, for dressing without the lamp was hardly pleasant. But soon his body began to glow, and then he jumped on the sleigh and took a look around.

Wow! What a cold gray landscape! The whole world lay flat about him, empty of forms or

Kak's Hunting

motion; while above in the sky dome, which looked very much like their roof on a huge scale, instead of shadows the gayly colored northern lights danced and dissolved.

Kak's spirits shot up like a rocket.

"Hurrah!" he yelled, and instantly stifled the cheer so as not to rouse their dogs.

The beauty of the Arctic dawn was wonderful and had to be expressed. Out there in the open he felt he could achieve. And this was going to be a gorgeous day, a marvelous chance for doing things—but what things? The boy balanced first on one leg and then on the other, trying to decide. He took a turn standing on his hands and viewing the world upside down. This helped, maybe because all the blood rushed into his brain, I don't know. You will have to try it for yourselves sometime—anyway, when he swung on to his feet again, he had a big idea.

Why should he not go a-hunting all day by himself? If he could catch a seal it would make him a man. How Hitkoak's eyes would snap with envy, for he had no sons to help provide. Kak's last exploit, fine as it was, had lacked one notable feature—the joy of dragging the evidence home. A boy cannot carry even a snow house about on his back like a snail, so not one of the girls actually saw

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

his famous building; and just yesterday Noashak had been very saucy about it, suggesting the boasted shelter was only a dug-out in the side of the drift. Now that sort of sisterly slam must be stopped. Kak felt it was up to him.

Urged by this need to do and to dare the boy stole into their tunnel, which is also an Eskimo's store-house, and took from its place his father's harpoon with its stout rope of reindeer sinew, the ivory bodkin used in sealing, a fox skin to keep his feet warm, and extra lengths of thong. The last article showed his good sense.

"I'm a small boy, after all," he reasoned, "and not nearly so strong as a man; and I've seen seals pull pretty hard. I'll wrap this line around my middle, tie it to the ice pick, and I don't care if I catch a whale!"

To kill a seal as Kak proposed doing is no easy matter. It takes infinite patience and a whole lot of time. The lad expected to be away hours and hours, so he gathered up some dried meat for his breakfast and lunch; and gave Sapsuk a good feed before starting. Then, rather alarmed by his own boldness, balancing the long harpoon firmly in one hand, and holding the dog leash in the other, he started on his day's hunt.

Kak knew the seals' ways: he had often watched

Kak's Hunting

his father and the neighbors catch them, and sometimes had been called upon to help. The thrill of his present enterprise lay in doing it all alone. For that he had started early before the family waked, and kept Sapsuk cowed with harsh whispers while he was feeding. No one would know where they had gone or what they were up to, until they came galloping over the ice, bringing the seal behind them.

Kak thought it immense fun to be off for a day with Sapsuk. The dog was a good hunter; just as knowing about seals as Taptuna himself, and absolutely necessary to the game. For since the seals live in the water under the ice, and the ice is covered with several inches and sometimes feet of snow, how could man or boy hope to find their tiny breathing holes scattered about that vast, white plain? It was easy for Sapsuk. He ran with his sharp nose close to the snow and sniffed and sniffed; and as soon as he smelt seal he commenced to run around in circles, scratching and pawing. Then his owner jerked him off quickly, lest he scare the game, and having marked the spot, took doggie away to a safe distance and tethered him on a jag or block of ice.

So that you can thoroughly understand Kak's horrible predicament later, I want to explain what was going on below the ice as well as what happened above. Seals are not like fish which can live in the

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

sea always. They have to come up into the air every little while to breathe, just as you do after diving and swimming under water. While it is summer, with all the ocean lying open, the seals have an easy time. They can drop down to fish or climb out to sleep in the sun, and enjoy all the best things of life without any trouble about it. But when Jack Frost comes along and begins forming his shining roof over their playgrounds, the poor animals have to look sharp. They *must* breathe air, and so they must keep holes open to breathe through. At first it is simple. They just dash up below the thin ice and bunt a hole in it with their heads. But Jack keeps on working; the ice grows thicker and is soon too strong to be broken; and then the seal, instead of crashing through in a minute, must gnaw and gnaw for hours, and keep on gnawing to keep his precious hole from freezing over. As the ice thickens it must gnaw all the quicker and all the harder. Sometimes in the middle of winter, the ice freezes six or seven feet thick, and the poor seal is still busy gnawing and gnawing and gnawing.

Though these holes are only the size of a half dollar at the top they must be large below, big enough for the animal's entire body, so it can swim up and poke its nose to the surface of the ice. The moment the seal sticks his nose up for that long

Kak's Hunting

breath is the hunter's single chance of spearing him, so he has to look sharp.

When Sapsuk had sniffed around in circles, settled his mind on one spot, and raised a paw to dig, Kak grabbed the leash and hauled him off.

"Too bad, old chap, to disappoint you," he apologized, patting his dog's thick coat. Sapsuk's being out of it was the worst part of sealing.

When he had consoled his favorite, Kak hurried back, dug away some of the snow, and feeling about very carefully found the small hole. There he placed his ivory bodkin sticking down through so that the seal would bump its point as he swam up to breathe. Next he cut himself a block of snow to sit on, and spread his fox skin under his feet. The boy took his extra line, wrapped it firmly about his waist, and unfastening the harpoon line from the ice pick on the upper end of the shaft, tied these two thongs fast together. He twisted a couple of turns back around near the pick so that the line would lie smoothly under his hand, and settled patiently to watch his bodkin, very much as you watch the float when you go fishing. There was no loafing or larking for Kak; all the time he held the harpoon in his hand and kept himself alert, ready if the ivory moved to strike down quickly and pierce the animal's snub nose.

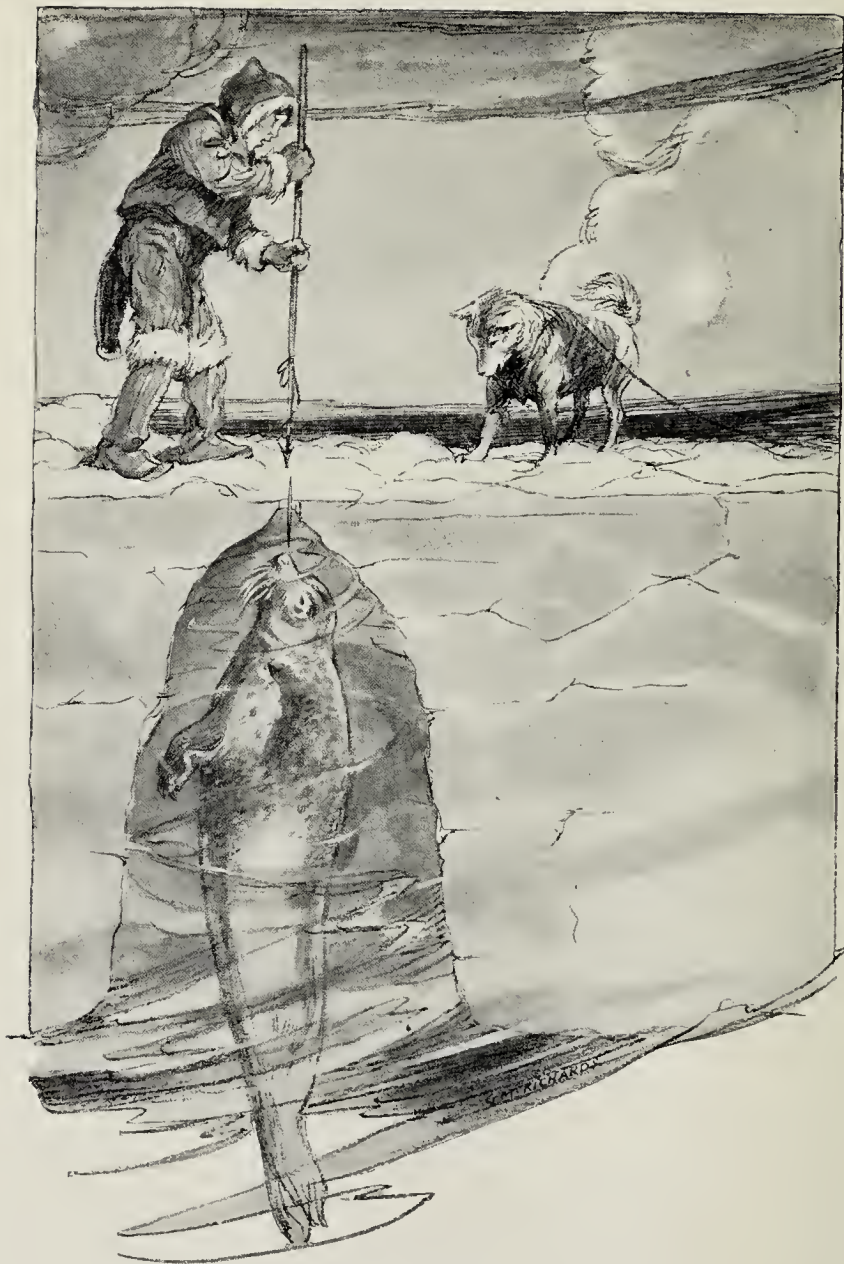
Kak, the Copper Eskimo

It sounds simple since the seal must come up for air. But seals are clever as well as shy; each animal makes several breathing holes, and a boy can watch only one; so if Sapsuk happened to find a place which the seal had just left, Kak would be obliged to watch hours before its owner returned.

After catching his prize, the hunter holds on to his thong till he cuts away the ice around the hole with his copper chisel and makes it large enough to drag his victim out. This is the thrilling part. This is what Kak counted on. Sitting all day long, watching, proved his mettle. The boy was no quitter, but he had remained two hours in one place and one position, and was terribly bored and aching for a run—a bit of a change—excuse to move about.

“It’s yell or bust!” he muttered.

Feeling hungry he laid the harpoon down for a moment and got out his package of dried meat. With this open on the ground beside him, he lunched, snatching one hand away from duty long enough to put a piece into his mouth, then taking firm hold again. While he ate he planned deserting for a little game with Sapsuk. The more he thought of it, the better a game seemed. Unconsciously he glanced toward his dog, and at that moment the ivory pin began to tremble, its motion caused by ripples in the water as a seal swam up. This was



HE DASHED DOWN THE SPEAR WITH ALL HIS FORCE

Kak's Hunting

the hunter's warning—but his wits were elsewhere. He had almost decided to quit and play when the bodkin suddenly jerked. Amid that world of tense inaction its bob crashed like a trumpet call. Kak's mind leaped. He thrust down the harpoon with all his force. The thrill of it gave him twice his usual strength and he struck as truly and a good deal harder than his father or Hitkoak would have done. It is the sure aim and not the muscle which counts. He knew at once he had hit his seal for he felt the knife sink into its flesh.

The startled animal pulled back, pulling the loose tip off the harpoon. Instantly Kak reversed the shaft and drove the pick deep into the ice. As the thong was around this, though not tied, it formed a sort of anchor; and with it and the loop on his body the boy imagined himself master of any situation. He seized the braided sinew as he had seen Taptuna do, but it simply tore through his fingers. He could no more hold against that terrific pull than turn a blizzard with his breath. He yelled for help. Sapsuk's was the only answering voice. Cold perspiration bathed him. He was in an agony of excitement. The beast would get away, such force must certainly snap the line. He would lose his prize and with it his father's best harpoon head. In a spasm Kak saw his grand adventure ending in dire disgrace. To

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

return home empty-handed, having to confess he had been unable to hold his seal—it was unthinkable! Spurred by the threatened shame he clutched madly, but the throng whizzed away from him, faster than it takes to tell, and snapped taut its length to the pick. It is impossible to get a good grip on a thin tight line; Kak, undefeated, grabbed the harpoon shaft and held on like fury.

There was an instant's lull below. The young hunter drew a deep breath and braced himself.

"Wolloping fishes! Who'd think a seal could pull so hard!"

Our boy's respect for his father and the men whom he saw landing their catches right along had grown some.

"Golly!"

The thing came alive again with a twist and a plunge. It yanked like a hundred-dog team. The sudden pull on the thong acted as a giant catapult, whirled the pick out of the ice, the shaft from Kak's hands, and sent them flying. The hunter fell forward, recovered, surged to his knees, saw his extra line a writhing serpent slip along the ice and tried to catch it—vainly. A second later, with a sharp zip the rope reached its limit and tightened about his waist like a vise, cutting his flesh through two coats, jerking him violently on to his face.

Kak's Hunting

A wail of pain and dismay rang through the clear air. Sapsuk answered with howls and barks. Kak felt like howling in chorus as he realized how he was caught. All his strength on the line failed to ease its pressure. And when the maddened animal dived the squeezing made him gasp.

The boy knew now this was no ordinary catch. It must be an ugrug, one of the huge bearded seals, almost as big and powerful as a bear; the knowledge gave him alternate thrills of delight and terror. He was torn between pride over spearing an ugrug, with insane desire to do the impossible and land the critter; and a mortal fear lest it should cut him in two. Wildly he tugged at the thong with an idea of loosening it sufficiently to squirm free. Let the monster take harpoon and all. Taptuna would forgive the loss when he heard how narrowly his son had escaped death. So Kak thought while the beast pulled; but when the pain eased a little, ambition soared. The youthful hunter pictured his reception if he strode home with the story of killing a bearded seal. At first they would laugh and cry shame on him for telling whoppers; then marvel open-mouthed, and finally believe when he proudly led his father forth and showed the prize.

For such a triumph Kak felt he would willingly give his life. At least he felt so while the ugrug

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

rested; when the brute plunged again he bellowed:
“Help! Help!”

Foxes! How the thong cut. Incessantly the ugrug dived back and flung about, trying to twist that horrible spear out of his nose; and up on top of the snow each movement sawed and sawed poor Kak’s soft tummy. The seal had him flat on his face now dragged right across the hole, powerless, exhausted. He could not even lift his head high enough to see over the rough ice. So long as that stout leather line held, Kak was the ugrug’s prisoner; just as much a prisoner as if he had been shut within four walls.

Our hero was gifted with what we call presence of mind. As his father had said: “The boy’s got sense.” Even in this dreadful plight he did not lose his head and cry, or give up hope; but exercised his nimble wits considering how he could best help himself.

The sun was coming up, struggling against a fog; if it would only shine out and warm his back Kak reckoned to withstand the cold, in spite of that horrid thong lashing him to the icy floor under its snow blanket.

He knew the family had slept till after daylight and when they woke and saw his place empty they would think he had only gone a short way and not

Kak's Hunting

bother till after breakfast. If his father missed the harpoon he would guess their plan and be in no hurry to follow, since squatting by a seal hole is a comparatively safe way to be lost. When he did start to find them it was going to take him a long time, because the boy and dog had made play of their hunting and run all around on the wide field. The snow was exceptionally hard, wind-driven, so their footprints would only show in drifted patches with gaps some of them maybe a quarter of a mile wide. You can understand that between criss-crossed tracks and no tracks and a thickening fog Taptuna's game of hare and hound would not be easy.

Lying as he did, flat on his face, the boy could not do much to draw attention. The idea of his father passing and neither of them knowing it worried him, till with sudden joy he recollected Sapsuk. The dog made a bold, dark mark. There was a good chance of Taptuna seeing Sapsuk if he came near at all. Hitkoak, too, would probably be hunting. With eyes riveted on his bodkin Kak had not noticed what was happening behind him. Their neighbor might be sitting close by. At the thought he tried to shout, but the snow muffled his voice; only his faithful pup heard and barked reply. That sound filled Kak with hope.

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

"Good dog! Good dog!" he cried. "Keep it up, old boy!"

"Yap—yap—yap!"

"Come on, old fellow. Come on!"

Thus urged the tethered canine pranced and yelped, straining at his leash, while Kak's heart glowed. Barking would carry far through the still air; and on the hunting ground such a racket could only mean trouble.

"Go it, old fellow!" he wheezed, almost smothered by snow.

But all at once Sapsuk decided his master was only playing pranks on him, and lay down sulking.

"Good old doggie, good boy."

He would not answer even to Kak's most wheedling tone; perhaps he did not hear.

The prisoner worked one arm loose and threw chunks of snow blindly in the dog's direction. No use! He could not hit him, and it was an old game anyway. Then Kak had an inspiration. The remains of his lunch lay open on the ground. He fumbled for a piece of meat, held it up and waved it as teasingly as he could. Sapsuk understood that—wanted it. Continuous barking followed.

"Wof—wof—whoooooooooof!"

The pup thought his master a pretty mean fellow

Kak's Hunting

not to toss him that one bite, and the boy's arm ached. Still, their alarm rang out.

The sun was about at its highest Kak judged, but obscured by fog. He seemed to be growing colder and colder and more and more cramped. The ugrug had been having the best of it for a long time. Nevertheless the pain in his nose and the blood he had lost through the wound were beginning to wear him out. He did not struggle so constantly, nor pull so hard, nor plunge so deep at the end of the third hour, and often lay quite still; but by then Kak felt too numb to move. He knew the fog had lifted and could hear Sapsuk making that dismal noise which eventually caught Taptuna's ear and brought him on the run. Once freed the dog dashed for his young master, while the Eskimo followed, not knowing what to expect.

It was a shock to see the boy stretched on his face so stiff and lifeless. Taptuna could only believe Kak had fallen and broken a leg—and frozen, perhaps, later. Trembling he sighed the boy's name.

"Dad," murmured Kak.

"He lives!"

With a great shout the man leaped into the air clapping his hands; Kak interrupted these transports of joy.

"Dad—he's got me."

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

"Got you? What does this mean—does the boy rave, is he in a trance?"

But there was nothing spooky or unreal about Kak's pride. "The ugrug," he said in an elated whisper, "round my waist."

Taptuna saw the thong then, thrust his arm under his son's body and pulled hard. For a second the huge seal, taken by surprise, allowed himself to go with the pull. Sharp pain in his nose reminded him of danger and set him battling again; but that moment's delay was enough for Taptuna to slack the noose and free Kak.

The boy rolled over on the snow with a sobbing intake of breath; he rose to his knees.

"Pull, kid!" yelled his father, who needed no explanation once he had felt the monster plunge.

His voice squealed with desire to land this great prize, and Kak, thrilled afresh, sprang into the fight. Of course the ugrug knew he was beaten with a man's hand on the line. His wound was very swollen and sore, and hurt like anything when they twitched it. He gave a wollop or two toward liberty, and bluffed at being almighty powerful, but little by little he had to surrender and follow his nose up into the hole.

Kak and Taptuna were already cautiously chopping the ice away at the surface. Slowly the bearded

Kak's Hunting

monster rose below them. As the ugrug came into the narrowest part of the hole it had no room to fight and its struggles ceased. The leather line held. Frantically Kak chopped and chopped with the stout copper ice chisel. The great bulk of the seal's body rose, slithered, rose again; their hands were almost on it. The boy's heart fluttered as he saw that gigantic creature which he had fought and won.

"Alone, my lad—alone! For it was practically over when I came. I have only helped you land him," Taptuna generously acknowledged when at last, with wild heaving and grunting and groaning, the slippery beast was drawn out and lay an inert mass at their feet.

Kak's nerves played him false then. He fell down on top of the seal and cried like Noashak.

"Tut, tut," said his father, patting him on the back. "You're cold and tired and hungry—but you're a man, Kak. You've got grit. Hanging on to an ugrug!"

"I couldn't get away. I'd have let him go if he would have let me go. I was afraid he'd pull me right through the ice," blubbered Kak.

Taptuna laughed. "He wasn't strong enough for that, boy. A dozen of him couldn't do it—but you might have cut the thong."

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

"I—I never thought of it!" confessed the brave hunter, feeling no end of a billy goat. "We would have lost the harpoon," he added, as a sort of excuse for sticking it out.

His father chuckled. He wondered how long the hero would look shamefaced after he met the girls and Guninana.

But before they turned homeward with the story and its proof Kak was to experience his crowning moment. When a hunter kills a bearded seal it is the custom for him to stand up and signal to all the other hunters within sight that they may come and share his prize. The boy was busy loosing Sapsuk from the carcass when his father said:

"You have forgotten something."

Kak had only once seen an ugrug caught. He looked questioningly at Taptuna.

"There is Hitkoak yonder. He has just settled down to watch his hole. He has not caught anything to-day."

The Eskimo pointed southward, and then Kak flushed to his ears. "You, father," he stammered.

"Not a bit of it! You got him."

The seal killer hesitated a moment, stepped on to his ugrug the better to be seen, and extending his arms at right angles waved the news of his wonder-

Kak's Hunting

ful catch. Hitkoak, far away, looked, rubbed his eyes, and looked again. Surely that short figure could be no other than Kak. What? Kak giving the signal for a bearded seal!

Hitkoak gathered up spear and bodkin and commenced to run.

Oh, the happy thrill of it as their neighbor gazed on the monster and heard Kak's tale; and the thrill when they arrived home, men and dogs dragging the seal. Guninana's wild laughter, the girls' bulging eyes, and Noashak's awe, were all items to be noted and remembered, and gloated over, and told and retold all his life long till Kak should be an old, old man. Hitkoak's wife, who was fat and lazy, came waddling over to hear the story. She clapped soft hands, smiling at the big supply of blubber; and they all took turns patting Kak's shoulders and asking him innumerable questions. Then they had a feast. Guninana made blood soup for a second course at dinner. The boy liked it exceedingly and drank a great deal, partly to hide his embarrassment, for they all kept on exclaiming and telling him he was the bravest son imaginable. Such unstinted praise nearly turned his head.

They all sat in a circle talking, admiring, marveling. The lamp shone brightly; the house grew

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hotter and hotter; Kak's ears burned with glory and bashfulness. He had pulled off his fur shirt on coming inside, according to Eskimo custom, and the red mark where that cruel thong had bound his body stood out like a ribbon of honor.

"It is my son who is the hero," chuckled Guni-nana, gently touching the scar with her plump fingers. "But half grown—and he has already slain his ugrug. The little man!"

Kak did not care much about that little man business. It made him look like a baby. Moreover, his mother was shedding tears of pride and happiness down his back as she gazed at Hitkoak's wife, who had no son. Very quietly he moved around beside his father.

He thought they would never have done with their questions. Honor had thrilled him at first but now he felt sleepy. He was weary of praise—the worst weariness in the world—and terribly tired. The sandman and the warm soup worked together, undermining his dignity. The boyish head nodded. He straightened up blinking fiercely once—twice. No, it was no use. Kak felt more tired than he had ever felt before—just exhausted. Suddenly he gave up, and right in the middle of Hitkoak's song toppled over fast asleep.

Kak's Hunting

Taptuna made room for him to lie, Guninana drew up a fur blanket, and the excited company continued praising him far into the night, their words of wonder and admiration mingling with our hero's gentle snores.

CHAPTER III

Strangers

It is an unfortunate fact that we can gain nothing in this world without having to make some return. Kak paid the price of his glory in killing the ugrug when it came time to fill the family larder and the lamp. He was now expected to lend a hand in all hunting expeditions. Not that they needed more seals than Taptuna had always provided; but with the boy along to guard a second hole the Eskimo could set a double trap for his hidden victim, and sometimes save hours of watchful waiting on the wind-swept ice.

Kak no longer felt enthusiastic about the hunt. He had done his noblest—had landed on the tiptop of achievement at one bound, and lesser triumphs rather bored him. Hauling in the little fellows seemed tame. He maintained a lofty attitude toward hunting in general and small seals in particular. But of course he went with Taptuna. Kak was above all things an ambitious boy, eager to be a man; and a real man's first concern is to hold up his

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end in duty as well as pleasure. So off they would trudge together, father and son, shoulder to shoulder, with one of the dogs trotting in front; search out their holes and squat on the ice, a little way apart yet companionable in the silence, till one or other of them saw his bodkin pop up, and speared his seal. Then they would get together to land it, and the day's work was done.

This was in the morning of the year. You know in Kak's country, not only the days divide themselves into light and darkness, but the whole year also. Spring and summer are light, autumn darkens, and Christmas comes in a continual twilight. Kak liked the autumn and winter best. To be sure, summer is cheerful. The sun never setting means daylight goes on all the time, and daylight activities with it. Nobody keeps any sort of regular hours. You sleep when you feel sleepy and eat whenever food is set before you; and it is all rather fun. But it grows terribly hot with the sun blazing over your head hour after hour for weeks. Kak often felt very uncomfortable even in a single old fur shirt; and if he took it off the pesky cloud of mosquitoes made life unbearable. Traveling without sleds over the rough ground was exceedingly difficult, too. So on the whole, he cared most for what we might call the evening, when the sun hid itself below the hori-

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zon, and the days were equal with the nights; when water froze and the snow fell gently, and hunting grew more agreeable. Next, he liked the period of moon and stars, or winter. Then the family settled into a comfortable snow house somewhere on the shore ice. Having eaten their stores of dried meat and oil during the fall, they were obliged to spear seals; but they did very little other work, and spent most of their time sitting about the lamp snug and warm, telling stories and singing songs.

One day in the morning of the year with the sun well up, Kak and his father went seal hunting. There were other hunters distant on the ice, for by now several families had joined Taptuna and Hitkoak. Luck continued poor. They had been sitting on snow blocks ever so long, the boy almost falling asleep from boredom, when he chanced to look in his daddy's direction, and was turned to stone by what he saw. Beyond those hunched shoulders, not so very far away, three men with a laden sled and many dogs were approaching rapidly.

Kak knew them for strangers at once. Their clothes were quite unlike the clothes worn by his own people; nor were their dogs harnessed each to a separate trace and spread fanlike, but one in front of the other—an imposing string of more than six animals. He had never dreamed anybody would

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drive more than three dogs on one sled. The novel magnificence of it all took his breath.

Fear and expectation leaped in the boy's heart. Every Eskimo believes there are bad Eskimos belonging to other tribes who are out to do him no good; if these were bad Eskimos there would be a fight—a glorious row with the odds all against them! Kak's blood pounded in his veins, for he saw another chance of distinguishing himself. Then he began to consider those odds: a man and a boy and Sapsuk against three grown men and ever so many dogs, and these strangers looked big husky fellows. His knees knocked queerly. It would be worse than an ugrug or even a bear—men are wickeder than beasts and cleverer—and if they took his father by surprise . . . No, no! That would never do. Kak understood he must warn Taptuna; but he did not want to let the enemy know he intended doing so lest they make a dash and get in first.

Plucking his bodkin from the hole the boy commenced to work around cautiously in his father's direction; as he drew nearer, where he could see the other's face, he suddenly knew that Taptuna was already watching the three men out on the ice; though he sat perfectly still and pretended to be minding his own business. You see, Kak's father

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thought much more gravely of those odds against them and wanted to avoid any chance of a quarrel; so he lay low—played 'possum till the party should arrive. If they came peacefully, well and good; if they showed fight—he was prepared. He darted a glance at Kak revealing this plan, commanding him to be silent; and the lad froze where he stood.

The strangers came on rapidly, stopped at a distance, looked long at Taptuna, and bunched together for consultation; arguing, pointing at the hunters, gesticulating excitedly. After a while one of the three walked forward alone.

The Eskimo stayed hunched over his fishing just like a rock on the ice. Kak could see he was watching out of the corners of his eyes, and holding himself ready. The boy smiled, for he knew his father a desperate, clever fighter, equal to any man single-handed.

On came the foreigner in his foreign clothes, walking confidently, swaggering boldly, offering no peace sign nor suggestion of any such thing. He acted as if he owned the earth. But when he was yet five paces away Taptuna sprang lightly to his feet, and seizing his long knife, flung himself into defensive position, while Sapsuk burst out with loud barks:

“Wow—woof—wow!”



TAPTUNA FLUNG HIMSELF INTO DEFENSIVE POSITION.

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The other dogs answered in half a dozen keys: "Yi—wow—yip—yap!"

The stranger stopped suddenly. All his cocksureness oozed away. His eyes stood out of his head and his breath came fast. Seeing the hunter brandishing his knife and ready to spring made the traveler shake all over. He looked more and more scared; he wanted to run back to his friends, and began to talk very fast and very loudly. For this fellow was an Eskimo also and quite as afraid of bad Eskimos as Kak's own people. Both men were terribly frightened. Taptuna started making noises with his mouth; he thought this stranger might be a kind of ghost or spirit that would bring trouble upon him unless he shooed the trouble away by such noises. And the stranger thought Taptuna meant to kill him, and hurried to explain, shouting his harmless intentions. So they both kept on jabbering, and frightening each other more and more, making talking sounds which neither one understood. Kak hugged himself, thrilled to the backbone, and scolded Sapsuk; and Sapsuk barked and barked; and the big fat seal that was knocking its nose on Taptuna's bodkin took alarm at the terrific row, and scooted back into the deep ocean and so got clean away. But nobody had noticed his sign of life, or knew he was there, and so nobody minded.

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By and by, through all the racket and commotion, it dawned on Taptuna that the visitor was not a spirit but a real, live man who was talking to him in real, human speech having understandable words sprinkled through it. So he listened hard and presently made out the three strangers were sight-seers who had come from a far land and meant no harm to any one; and if they had omitted the peace sign it was only because, not having been that way before, they were ignorant of the customs. Then the traveler lifted his coat to show he had no knife, and Kak watched his father feel him all over to make sure of it.

When Taptuna showed he was satisfied the boy laughed aloud and dashed forward, wild excitement dancing in his eyes, and a hundred questions tumbling off his tongue.

"Where are you going? Where have you come from? What are you called? Oh, do, do tell us!"

He thought this miles better than a fight. Now they could all talk. He wanted to know about their far-away home. He wanted to hear it in a single word. But Taptuna threw cold water over such enthusiasm. Eskimos do not consider it polite to harry a stranger with questions. Kak's father cried:

"Tut! Be off to your mother and say we have guests coming for dinner."

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At that Kak, rather ashamed of his bad manners, went racing away to carry his message. He was not afraid to leave Taptuna, for already the hunters of the village, whose attention had been attracted by all the noise, were running in from every side. Kak, romping on with Sapsuk, madly yelled the news to those he met and they hurried up, knowing this a great occasion. The stranger was escorted toward the group of houses on the ice, the other men being allowed to follow with their dogs and sleigh, but not to come any nearer, because Taptuna would not take the responsibility of receiving these travelers without first consulting his neighbors. As each seal hunter, carrying his sharp knife and spear, joined the party, the stranger looked more and more scared. He could understand much of their speech though, and began to feel better when he heard himself and his friends spoken of as honest fellows who might be welcomed without fear of treachery.

Think what a tremendous event it was for these lonely folk in their few small houses, in the midst of that vast, deserted snow field, to receive a visit from a distinguished foreigner; for that is what the leader of the party turned out to be. Two of the travelers were Eskimos from far west on the north shore of Canada; and the other was a white man who had come all the way from New York to learn what sort

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of people lived on the tiptop of the world, and who had studied their language so he could talk with them and really be friends.

Kak had never seen a white man, but he had heard of them from other tribes of Eskimos—Kablunats they were called. He did not think this visitor deserved the name, for he was really not white at all, but very much his own complexion, with blue eyes instead of brown, and the same dark brown hair. The lad was intensely disappointed. He had always imagined a race of people glistening and shining like frosty snow; and the grown-up folk felt very much the same. Hitkoak made him stand beside this so-called "white man" to show how alike they were; and Guninana laughed at her squat boy, for in his fur clothes Kak looked about as broad as he was long.

"You're not so different in color, son; but you will have to grow like a young caribou before you can cut any figure in his country."

Ah, if she had known what a spur to Kak's ambition those words were to prove! "Cut a figure in his country!" He would never have thought of such a thing himself; but from the moment his mother's idle humor planted the seed, that idea lay hidden in the bottom, inmost part, of the boy's soul. He would attach himself to this Kabluna, would make

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himself useful, run messages, travel with him, hunt for him; and perhaps, when they went away over the edge of the earth again, he might be permitted to go along. Of course this scheme did not prance right into his mind whole, it grew and developed during the stranger's stay.

For a while everybody was busy admiring their guests and getting acquainted.

The Kabluna wore fine fur clothes and carried under his arm a peculiar, long implement made partly of wood and partly of metal. Kak was simply dying to ask about this, to handle and examine it, only he would not let himself go, because his father had already reproved him for questioning.

"Is it a spear?" he thought, peeping behind the stranger. "No—it can't be. There is no least sign of a knife."

He ached to understand the odd thing, but had to wait, for now Hitkoak's wife and the girls came running to be presented to the visitors, and the whole community stood about, all talking at once, with a deafening hubbub and babble and noise of barking dogs. Noashak, who I have told you was a rude, spoiled, forward little girl, threw herself on the strangers one after another; jumping up to touch their faces, getting under their feet, clinging to their hands, and mauling their clothes. They only

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laughed good-naturedly, which pleased Guninana and sent her hurrying off to put her largest cooking pot over the lamp.

Hitkoak had invited one of the two Eskimos to stop in his house, the other went elsewhere, while Taptuna entertained the white man. This arrangement gave Kak much secret satisfaction, he was so thrilled by desire to handle that long-nosed weapon.

"When the Kabluna enters to eat he will put it on one side in the tunnel, and that will be my chance," the boy reasoned. But there was no chance, for the stranger carefully placed his gun in a special case strapped to one side of the sled, and covered it up closely; and nobody, except perhaps naughty Noashak, would have dared to think of opening that case.

Kak's heart sank into his boots. It took his sister's diverting cries of: "A feast! A feast! Blood soup!" to cheer him up.

"Blood soup—wow!"

Maybe that does not sound good to you, but Eskimos love it, and Guninana could make the delicacy just right. Lips smacked, eyes brightened, Taptuna and Kak hurried their guest inside; and almost before he was clear of the tunnel Noashak hurled herself on him. Now the Kabluna had come to live with them she claimed him for her own:

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scrambled on to his knee, felt his bushy hair, tried to tickle him, and pried out of his fingers a little box he had taken from among his things on the sled when he put the gun away; such a curious little box, full of many little straight pieces of wood, with red ends stuck on to them like tiny bits of rock. Noashak was delighted. She opened the box upside down and all the pieces fell out over the rug.

“Now, now! Leave our visitor in peace!” her father cried; and Guninana, squatting in front of her lamp, scolded mildly.

But Noashak only laughed. She knew she might safely be as naughty as she liked, for her parents never punished her. That is probably why she was so very awful and a plague to everybody.

In our country when a boy is really mischievous and bad his father or mother or schoolmaster or somebody gets after him and gives him a first-class, good whipping to drive the badness out. Unfortunately Eskimos believe if they whip their children, or punish them at all, they will drive not badness but goodness away from them—a sort of guardian angel who brings the children luck and blessings. Of course if either boy or girl is naughty enough to need to be whipped, it is quite fair for the angel to pick up and go off; but the parents naturally do not want this to happen, so they try to bluff the spirit

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by not punishing at all. No matter how bad Noashak was, she never got a whipping—but oh, how the neighbors hated her at times!

Even the Kabluna thought her a bother when he saw all his matches spilled on the rug. He began to gather them together carefully, for there are no shops in Victoria Island where one can buy such things, and it is very awkward to run out of matches when traveling in an ice-cold country. Two articles the white man valued more than anything else—the ammunition for his gun and his matches. However, since he was a stranger, far away from home, and her father's guest, and had come so many miles to see these people, and wanted above all things to be friends with them, he did not say one cross word nor even frown; but took up a single little piece of wood, struck its rock end, and held the fire out to Noashak. Now when the child saw this magic and felt the hot flame she leaped away, hiding behind Taptuna, and would not come near the visitor again; though the others crowded around full of wonder. They had never seen a sulphur match.

The Kabluna lighted another and another, explaining their convenience, and finally allowed Kak to strike one and hold it blazing in his own fingers. Thus encouraged, the boy blurted out his eager question:

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"That queer weapon you carried under your arm—what is it for?"

The white man smiled. "You mean my rifle?"

Kak never having heard the foreign word, rifle, looked puzzled. "The thing with a long nose," he explained. "The one you packed away on the sled."

"Yes," the Kabluna answered, while his kind blue eyes held Kak's. "We call it a rifle—it is for hunting. To-morrow I will show you how it kills animals from a great distance."

The boy beamed. He liked this stranger; and the stranger liked him. He had spotted Kak as a bright youngster during the first half hour, and was willing to take some trouble and tell him stories of the far-away country, wording them simply so they could be understood. Our everyday life and surroundings are so strange to the Eskimos they could not possibly conceive them from just hearing the names spoken. If you had never seen a wheel you would find it difficult to think of a great, puffing, railroad engine. These people had never seen wheels nor any means of going about but the dog-drawn sleds, skin boats called kayaks, and their own legs; so the white man did not talk about street cars or telephones or automobiles, but described our homes built up and up, one room on top of another, till they were six rooms high, and twice six rooms high,

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occasionally even six times six rooms high. These Eskimos cannot count above six, so this was his only way of conveying an idea about the height of our tall buildings.

Kak worked it out next morning with snow blocks.

"Six times six rooms high!" he marveled, gazing at the pile.

It seemed unbelievable. Why should anybody want to build up into the air that way with all the open ground to spread on? He looked over his flat, white world, stretching bare and vast north, east, south, and west, and muttered: "Unbelievable!"

Kak had heard many stories of their shamans, or medicine-men, going to sleep and visiting the moon in their sleep, and seeing things quite as extraordinary as houses six times six rooms high. None of these, however, had fired him with a desire to follow. Now he tried to imagine climbing up the outside of such a house to the very top, pinching himself all the way to be sure he was awake. The notion made him chuckle, but not loud enough to interrupt. He intended to be very polite and hear more and more. So he sat quiet listening with his mouth a little open and his eyes wide and round; and at the end of each tale, while the others cried their amazement, he nodded, saying in his heart:

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"Some day I will travel to the Kabluna's country and see these marvels for myself."

They sat late over breakfast next morning listening to more queer talk, till at last their neighbor roused them calling in the tunnel:

"I am Hitkoak. I am coming in."

This is the polite way for an Eskimo to announce his visit.

The other two strangers were already outside feeding the dogs and waiting for their chief's word as to what they were to do that day. They called the Kabluna, Omialik, which really means Commander; but Eastern Eskimos have no conception of one man being master over another or employing him for wages. Such conditions do not exist among them. So hearing this title they took it for his name, and all addressed him by it.

Hitkoak had discovered from his guest how anxious the explorer was to meet with natives, and so he had formed the brilliant idea of escorting the party to the nearest village which, he said, ought now to lie about a day's journey away on the shore of Victoria Island. Eskimos are never quite sure where their towns are to be found, for even the places have a way of packing up and moving off. When comfortable houses can be built in a couple of hours, and each householder can carry all his belongings on one

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sled, it is easiest, if the fishing or hunting proves bad, just to move the whole village over to another site. Generally so many sleighs moving make a very deep track which will not be covered even by storms and blizzards for about three months, so that if at first you do not find the place you want to reach, you follow on and follow on until you overtake it.

Omialik was immensely pleased with the idea of visiting a local town; and instantly everybody wanted to go. Kak wanted to go. He itched to go; but he did not clamor about it half so loudly as the girls. Hitkoak put his foot down, saying it would never do for them all to flock over; for so many women and children and dogs landing in to be fed might embarrass their kinsmen; so after a hubbub of talk it was decided that Taptuna, whose brother lived in the neighboring village, and who had been there recently, should act as guide. Guninana was much better able to take care of herself than the other women, and she had more food laid by also.

Kak listened with his whole soul to the ins and outs of this argument; and when it was finished he literally threw himself on his father.

“Let me go! Let me go, too! I must go—I can hunt, I can walk, I can build houses. Oh, dad, do, do let me go with you!”

“And who will take care of your mother?”

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"Noashak!" the boy cried fiercely, saying the first thing that rushed into his head.

That was a fine joke. They all laughed heartily. Now sometimes it is a good sign to have one's request laughed at, for it puts grown-ups into a jolly humor; and again it is very bad, and means the thing is not even to be considered seriously. Kak hardly knew what to make of his parents' amusement. He looked doubtfully from one to the other, and at last turned beseeching eyes on the Kabluna.

"If the boy can be spared, let him come," said Omialik, and made Kak his friend for life.

Taptuna's glance questioned his wife.

"Yes, yes, certainly, let our brave hero go! Noashak will take care of me very well." Guninana's sides shook with uncontrolled mirth. "I want to hear all that happens up yonder anyway, and the lad's stories will be better than yours, Taptuna."

So it was agreed. Kak could not stay indoors with the excitement of his great adventure surging in his veins; he had to go out and tear up and down, and yell, and let off steam generally.

Besides the glory and honor of arriving at the village in such distinguished company, he would see his cousin, Akpek, who was his own age and his best chum, and to whom he had long wanted to boast about killing that ugrug. Kak knew Taptuna could

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not resist telling of his son's house-building and hunting to Uncle Kitirkolak; and he anticipated the relations would all make a big fuss over him when they heard the news. Akpek would have to pay him a lot of respect.

They were not to start until next morning for the strangers, both men and dogs, needed a good rest; and Kak thought he would never be able to put in the time; however, this turned out to be one of the most thrilling days of his life. Omialik did not forget his promise about the rifle. He took the weapon from its case and allowed Kak to examine it closely; hold it in his own hands; place it at his shoulder and look, as directed, down the long nose. The boy could not at all understand how it worked so their guest showed him. There being no wild animals about he set up a stick, walked far away, raised the gun, and sent a bullet through the wood from where he stood. The Eskimos were not greatly impressed for they thought it magic. Their own shamans told them constantly of strong spells which would kill animals unseen, and carry people to the moon, and so forth. What really excited everybody was the tremendous bang the gun made when it went off. Hitkoak's wife and the girls were so frightened they ran into their own house and would not come out; and Noashak howled at the top of her lungs and kept on

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howling till poor Guninana, who was pretty well scared herself, begged the kind Kabluna not to do it again.

He did do it again though, just once more, to satisfy Kak. And when Kak learned it was not magic, and saw the small piece of metal which flew out of the rifle straight to its mark, he was crazy to try it himself.

"Oh, let me, let me, let me!" he teased, dancing up and down in a frenzy of desire. "I only want to whang it off once—I'm sure I can hit the stick."

The white man shook his head. "No you can't, not at the first trial—no one ever does. The fact is," he explained, "I can only shoot this gun off a certain number of times until I get back to my own country, because I have only a certain number of bullets. We may need them all to kill animals for food, so I dare not waste any more."

"Can they bang? Can they make holes in the stick?" Kak asked, pointing to the strange Eskimos.

"Yes, sometimes. The little fellow shoots pretty well."

"If he learned, I can learn!"

This was not boast; the lad only felt very sure of himself and intensely in earnest; so his friend answered seriously:

"That is true. You can learn. But if you want

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to learn to shoot you must come to Herschel Island where there are shops to buy bullets—and it is a long, long way.”

“I don’t care! I’ll go! I’d like first rate to see places and shops and bullets. May I go along with you?”

Our lad had yet to understand the words he used; but he was throbbing with wild ambition; his gray eyes sparkled, and his perfect teeth gleamed in a double row. He looked a volcano of enthusiasm.

The white man laughed. “Wait, youngster! Wait! You go too fast for me. To-morrow we will try out what kind of traveler you are.”

That set the boy’s heart glowing with pride and hope. Well Kak knew he could prove himself a man on the trail. Had he not been to the village before; to fresh fishing grounds and new hunting grounds; indeed, half over Victoria Island? For his father was a restless soul, always moving from place to place and dragging Guninana and the children after him.

“Huh, all right! It’s a bargain,” was the satisfied answer.

Kak had a chance to prove his endurance next day for they struck from deserted site to deserted site, going many miles around out of their road in order to cling to the remnant of a faint track which would

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surely lead where the people now were. They camped after dark and rose early to find themselves in view of the town—a cluster of houses looking from a distance like so many snow cakes you might have turned out of a patty pan. Then Taptuna bade the strangers wait while he and Kak raced ahead to announce them and tell the people they were friends. Otherwise, if the dogs stirred and the Eskimos grew alarmed, they might dash out and try to kill the whole party.

Kak ran faster than his dad and reaching Kitir-kolak's home first vanished out of sight. He did not have to go into an underground tunnel, for this house was built with a doorway and a long shed leading to it.

"I am Kak," he cried. "I am coming in," and immediately popped his head through the hole in the wall.

His aunt rolled out of bed with three small children on top of her, gasping:

"Kak, you scamp! Bless the boy! How did he get here?"

"I came on my two feet with father and three strangers, one of them is a Kabluna——" He was panting from running and tried to tell everything in a breath, and had to stop and puff.

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"Kabluna," chorused the children without an idea of what it meant.

Akpek was already scrambling into his trousers. Kak's uncle raised himself on one elbow and blinked sleepy eyes. "Is your father here?" he asked.

"Yes, and two strange Eskimos from far away, and Omialik from farther away. They are all over yonder; and they have two more than six dogs and much gear on their sled, and a long-nosed gun to kill animals, and little wooden sticks which carry fire. He let me try them myself——"

"Where is he?" yelled Akpek. "I want to try them!"

"No, you can't. He hasn't any more to waste. If you want to learn to shoot you must go to Herschel Island, and it's far, far away—but I am going sometime——"

Aunt and uncle were hurrying into their clothes. Between boots and coats they stopped to hear the boy's fantastic talk, little of which they understood. Akpek had but a single thought.

"Where is he?" he demanded, all ready to go.

"Come on and I'll show him to you. They are waiting to be introduced. But you needn't be afraid—it's all right! I know them. They are friends of mine."

Kak swaggered out of the shed, followed by his

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cousin; and so it was that Akpek came first of all his village to welcome the Kabluna.

The rest of the company were not far behind. Taptuna had been dashing from house to house telling his news; and soon all the men and boys came rushing out, talking excitedly and asking questions; some of them were even putting their clothes on as they came, which seems very odd if you stop to think how cold it was! When they felt sure the strangers were not bad Eskimos and did not intend to play them any tricks, they all formed in a line and walked out to welcome them, holding their arms above their heads and saying:

“We are friendly. We carry no knives. Your coming has made us glad.”

Omialik's party copied this, and when the two lines met they began a formal sort of introduction, each man telling his name to the others; but Kak and Akpek, who had joined the village, grew tired of the business and broke away, and that upset everything; so the people all began to talk together.

“Now what shall we do to celebrate?” asked Kit-irkolak, who was a leading man and anxious to give their visitors the kind of welcome which they would best like.

The Kabluna said Eskimos farther west danced when they felt glad; so it was quickly decided to

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have a grand general dance. Immediately all the men and boys ran off for their snow knives and began building a magnificent house, large enough to hold about fifty people standing, allowing space in the middle for the dancers. Then the girls ran for their drums, and commenced to sing; and they all felt so glad and happy they wanted to dance before the house was finished, though it only took a couple of hours to build it. Think of being able to build a perfectly beautiful dancing palace in a few hours! That is what can be done with cold snow blocks.

Kak had never before in his life enjoyed such a glorious time. The excitement went on and on; it seemed as if it would never stop. The villagers had also built a snow house for their guests to live in, and when everybody was tired to death dancing, they went away to their own homes; but Kak and his father stayed with Kitirkolak. The two boys curled up in bed together and whispered and whispered to each other long after the rest of the family were fast asleep. Kak had to tell about killing the ugrug. He simply could not keep it in a minute longer; and when Akpek chuckled from sheer disbelief, his cousin exclaimed angrily:

“Just you ask my father and see if it isn’t true!”

“Oh, all right!” Akpek agreed, for he hated quar-

Strangers

rels. "I'll believe it. I dare say you did spear the old ugrug; but anyway I've been in a bear hunt where our best dog was killed; and if you'd been there you would have run like the wind. Gee! It was some slaughter."

That shut Kak up for a minute. He was more afraid of bears than of anything else in the world; but of course he did not want to admit that any wild animal could scare him enough to make him run away.

"When I get a gun," he bragged, "I'd like to see any bear attack me. Why, I'd just walk right up and stick the long nose into the bear's mouth and shoot it off, whang!—and where would your bear be then?"

"Well, maybe you'll have a chance, for there are lots of bears about," grunted Akpek as he turned over to go to sleep.

Kak lay very still, but wide awake. This talk of bears upset him. Suppose a bear were to come stalking about the house now, waking up the dogs; and they all had to run out, not even waiting to put on their clothes, and fight him off hand to hand. Oooch! The boy shivered. He really was horribly afraid of bears, and he wished he could be a shaman and have a powerful magic that would kill wild animals be-

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fore they appeared; instead of having to stand still till the beast came close, or else creep nearer and nearer without letting the bear see you, and so get a good crack at him—which the Kabluna said was the right way to hunt with a gun.

CHAPTER IV

Bears

THE day following the dance all the villagers felt very tired; they slept late, neglected to go hunting, and spent the time standing about talking with the strangers, or escorting Omialik from house to house; showing him their family belongings and clothes, their lamps and pots, hunting implements, bows and arrows, spears and harpoons. He wanted to take a number of these away with him to be placed in museums in New York and other cities (where many of them are now, and where you can go and see them if you care to) and the business of trading took a long time. Moreover he asked a variety of questions about where they got the stone for their lamps and the wood for their sleds, what sort of people lived to the eastward, and so on and so forth. All their answers he wrote down in a small book.

Although the Eskimos think it impolite to ask questions, they were very kind about answering.

Now this sort of thing, while it was important to the white man, promised a dreadfully dull day for

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two lively lads like Kak and Akpek. So when they had hung around several hours waiting for action and excitement they gave up, thoroughly disgusted, and decided to have some fun of their own.

“Let’s go out to the rough ice and play at climbing houses six times six rooms high,” Kak suggested.

If you stop to consider you will see this notion of climbing the outside of a tall house was perfectly natural to an Arctic boy. Kak had no conception of buildings with straight walls, for his winter home was shaped like an old-fashioned beehive, and the proudest summer home they ever attained was a tent. Besides he had never in his life seen a stairway, and it is extremely difficult to imagine what you have never seen. How could he think of climbing up inside a house by means of stairs? But he had often scrambled on top of their snow dome to slide down with the girls, or get a view of the surrounding country; and so when he told Akpek of houses six times six rooms high, he had in mind a huge pile of snow up the outside of which they would have to walk; and the pressure ice, piled by the winter storms into ridges of great blocks, chunk on chunk, was not such a poor imitation of this idea.

Akpek was eager enough to go. That day he was glad to join in any game suggested by his wonderful cousin; for Taptuna had not been able to resist

Bears

bragging about his son's hunting, and the story of the ugrug sounded quite different and terribly impressive when told among the grown-ups. Hearing his father congratulate Kak, and his mother praise him, made the other boy feel pretty small and mean about his boasting of bear hunting the night before; and now he shyly endeavored to make up to his chum for having doubted him.

The boys started off shouting and running races, each anxious to get to the rough ice first and claim the highest hummock for his house. This was a dandy new play and a dandy place to play it. American boys would doubtless have called the game "Castles" for the shining pinnacles and spires of the ice blocks made splendid towers, and the whole mass looked so handsome shimmering in bright sunshine under a cloudless sky, its arms uplifted into the blue, and twinkling all over with a sort of frosted Christmas card effect, it really deserved a magnificent name. But Kak and Akpek had never heard of castles, nor indeed any building finer than the dance hall of the day before, so they were quite content to talk about playing at "high houses."

Bursts of speed and rollicking noise both stopped when they struck the rough ice and needed their breath for climbing. From there they went as

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quietly as hunters, till they had each crested the top of a large cake; then rivalry broke loose.

"I'm above you! Mine is the highest!" Kak cried exultantly, swinging his sealskin boots over the edge of a precipice. But even while he chortled in his glory, Akpek spied a higher peak, and swarming down from his first choice without a word of warning, shinned up the second.

"Yo ho, there!" he crowed from what was really a daring, difficult perch. "Who said you were on a high house? Look at me!"

"Foxes!" yelled Kak, all his pride gone in a minute. "Come down out of that. Don't you know I've got to be on top because it's my game!"

But Akpek only jeered.

Then our hero started up furiously to pull his cousin down; and Akpek came laughing, for he was always good-natured, and although a tall lad and a good climber, not at all sorry to be off that slippery ice arm.

"Leave it alone," he advised. "It's a beggar!"

"You believe I can climb it?" Kak asked.

"Sure as life," replied the other, feeling rather sheepish, for this was a thrust at his behavior last night. "'Tain't hard," he added.

"All right. So long as you don't think I'm scared to try," Kak answered grandly.



"I'M THE KING OF THE CASTLE!"

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So they called a truce and abandoned that ice pile for a more tempting, bigger one lying farther out in the ridge. Of course they had to race for it, and Kak, who felt he had been worsted on the last, ran swiftly and climbed like a mountain goat up a wonderful tower which was cut off flat on the top so he could stand erect, and even dance a step or two and wave his arms. And when Akpek came in sight he was dancing up there, singing something like: "I'm the king of the castle!"

Akpek laughed at him, calling, "Hold on, I'm coming too," and began to climb with all his might.

Kak refused to have company at first, pretending to be very angry, and trying to shove him off. But the other boy said that was no kind of game; he only liked sports where people could be jolly and friendly, that dancing together was far nicer than fighting—think what a fine time they had all enjoyed yesterday instead of rowing and killing each other; so then Kak changed and helped him up, and they joined hands and danced a silent sort of clog-dance out there on top of the towering ice cake.

Now while the boys were away on the ice the Kabluna grew tired of looking at things and talking, and decided to go out alone for a walk with his camera and his gun. He wanted to be prepared for anything, either a good view or a wild animal—

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particularly the latter. For although the Eskimos were very kind and generous and ready to entertain these guests, feeding them and their dogs as long as the food lasted, Omialik did not care to be dependent on the village. It is always a good thing to hold up your own end in any situation. He knew the people would respect him a great deal more if he were able to give them some fresh meat, instead of having to take part of their supply. He started across the ridge hoping to find a fat seal; and when he reached a good crest sat down, took out his fieldglasses, and commenced to search very carefully in every direction. He did not intend to kill the seal with a spear as the Eskimos do, but hoped to be able to shoot one which had crawled out on the ice to bask in the sunshine. Seals are fond of coming up and lying about snoozing. As soon as the weather grows warm they break away the ice from their holes, till these are large enough for the owner to climb through; then Mr. Seal pokes up his head and shoulders into the air, and working his flappers over the edge, hoists himself out.

While Omialik sat watching he happened to turn his glasses on to the broken spire which Kak and Akpek had chosen for their dance. The lens was so powerful it brought the boys right close up, so that the Kabluna could see their funny, jolly faces; it

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made him almost hear their laughter, and he laughed in chorus. That silent, awkward, pantomime dance was as good as a play. Omialik said to himself: "I will take a photograph of this, and when I get back to New York I can show the American children what merry lads live up on the tiptop of the world."

He was much too far away to take a photograph at that minute, but he knew Kak and Akpek would be good enough to go back and pose for him if he could head them off on their way home. So he hurried down, thinking no more about seals, and started in the boys' direction. Once you get into the rough ice it is like walking among mountains; you cannot judge one valley from the next, nor guess what lies beyond each hummock. The Kabluna could see his friends so long as they stayed up on their little sky theater; but after they grew tired of the game and left, they were entirely lost to him. Yet he kept on, for he was on the shore side and they must be coming back soon; and when they got nearer he would attract their attention by calling.

In the middle of the dance Akpek thought of a joke he might play on his cousin, so he said he felt hungry and that it was time to go home, and his hands were cold; and although Kak tried his best to persuade him to stay, he scrambled down from the tower.

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Well, of course, there was more room to dance with only one up on top. Kak could not resist giving a final fling or two, and singing again:

"I'm the king of the castle!"

And while he was right in the middle of it Akpek looked up and shouted:

"Bears! Bears!"

Poor Kak! Every last ounce of blood dropped out of his heart. His song broke on a high note. He missed a step and nearly fell. Akpek stood still in an attitude of terror watching him come slithering and sliding down, not caring how he came. And then that cruel boy doubled over and nearly died from laughing because there were no animals at all; he had only called out to frighten his cousin whose fear of bears was known to everybody.

When Kak discovered the trick that had been played on him he felt nasty and said he was going home; and now Akpek could not persuade *him* to stay. The boys walked along silently trying to find a path between the ice hummocks, and not enjoying themselves a bit. Nothing takes the zest out of things like a quarrel. They felt tired from their day's climbing, and now only wanted to get home the shortest and easiest way.

"Isn't that Omialik?" Akpek asked brusquely,

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pointing to a figure scrambling over the ridge with the sun shining full upon it.

"Don't know."

They could tell it was one of the strangers from his long, tailless coat.

"It is—it is!" Kak suddenly cried, brightening. "He's got his gun. I wish a bear would come so you could hear it bang off! You'd be scared then."

"Scared—me!"

The man disappeared behind an ice hummock. Akpek continued indignantly: "Say, it takes more than a little puff of noise to scare me! What do you think? Have we been deaf all winter while this ice ridge was piling up here?"

"That's different—nobody minds ice screeching. The gun makes a terrific bang like thunder, only worse. I tell you I wish we'd meet a bear—almost."

The last word was hastily added as Kak realized the enormity of his wish. He had an uneasy idea that when a lad wishes aloud he sometimes gets his wish. Akpek's next words did nothing to soothe him.

"Well, I ain't scared anyway, and you are."

"I'm not!"

"You are too."

"Didn't I kill an ugrug?"

"That's nothing to do with bears. I dare say

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you'd feel all hollow inside if you saw one right now."

"So would you."

"I would not!"

The boys continued to argue. They were passing through a small pocket of level ice among lower cakes, while the Kabluna, who had just caught a glimpse of them, ran up a neighboring valley in their direction.

"You think you're some hunter," Kak insisted. "But what have you ever done alone? Now I——"

"Ah, cheese it!" his cousin laughed in great good humor. "I guess if we saw a bear right here, without a dog, or a bow and arrow, or a spear or anything, we'd both drop dead."

"Speak for yourself——"

"Chrrrrrrrrr——!"

The sound stabbing Kak's sentence sounded much like a cat on a back fence, only horribly loud and near. If you had heard it in the city you might have taken it for the grinding of motor gears; or in the country for an angry gander. To the Eskimos it meant but one thing.

Both boys leaped about three feet off the ice, turned while leaping, and came down the other way round face to face with a huge polar bear. He was standing above them on the ridge, his massive front

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paws almost near enough to reach out and knock them over. The beast's small eyes glistened; his yellow teeth showed under a curled lip below his sharp, black nose; and his head swung from side to side as if he were asking himself:

"Which shall I eat first; or shall I tackle both at once?"

The bear was hungry. Luck in catching seals had been poor lately and the cousins looked to him like two juicy, big fellows. They had smelt very good as he followed them up-wind, for Kak and Akpek had played with dead seals while waiting in the village for the day's fun to begin; and when the pursuer actually saw them he could not refrain, in his joy over a square meal, from giving that nasty bear laugh. It was a fortunate thing for the boys that he felt so jolly. If he had only kept quiet and pounced he would have made sure of one course anyway.

The enemy seemed in no hurry. Hours and hours and hours and seconds he stood gloating, while the boys, hypnotized by fear, stared into his white face, which was not a bit whiter than their own. Goose flesh had burst out all over them like a rash, every hair on their bodies felt as if it were rising on end, their knees trembled, and their tongues stuck to the roofs of their mouths. Kak did give one gurgle, a

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faint, choked sound that hardly reached farther than the walls of their ice pocket. It was living evidence of his stark terror but as a cry for help must be counted out; yet Akpek, who was positively frozen stiff with fear, lungs and throat and all, and quite incapable of making any sound or moving hand or foot, was mean enough afterward to throw it up to Kak that he yelled.

Now the Kabluna was a mighty hunter. He had killed dozens and dozens of white bears and grizzly bears and wolves and seals and all kinds of beasts and wild birds; and he had trained both his eyes and his ears to miss nothing when he was out in the open. That hard, hissing noise, violently rasping the youngsters' nerves, had reached him faintly while climbing the other side of the ice ridge. In an instant he was tearing forward, unslinging his gun from his shoulder as he ran.

He saw the bear first—a yellow-white blot between the shimmering snow-covered pile and the blue sky; then Kak's wheeze of agony drew his attention to the human prey below.

Crack!

The huge animal was gathering himself to spring when the bullet tearing into his shoulder upset his calculations. He didn't know what had hit him; but he lost his balance and instead of landing on

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top of the boys tumbled heels over head at their feet. That was the most frightful moment of all, when they saw him coming and thought a thousand pounds of white bear was bound to crash on to them. But the abruptness of it broke his spell; Akpek and Kak were dashing to the Kabluna for shelter before Mr. Polar Bear could scramble to his feet and make connections.

The whole situation had reversed in a twinkling. The bear, from having all the best of it, was now much the worst off. He was down and the boys up. His fine seals had escaped, and a third strange animal, with command of this queer, stinging, long-distance bite, was standing aloft and just going to do it again. Dumbly the poor beast looked up, measured his foe, and in mute fear turned to fly from there; but as he turned Omialik's rifle cracked again, and a bullet through his side, entering his heart, put an end to all his hunger. He proved to be a very poor, thin old bear and the hunter felt almost sorry to have killed him; but the boys talked loud and fast, bubbling over with excited thanks.

"It is lucky I came along right then," the white man scolded. "You youngsters have no business to be so far out here alone, without weapons or dogs."

He felt cross because it seemed too bad that such

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jolly kids should take any chances on ending up as a bear's supper.

What to do next was now the question. Somebody must mount guard and keep the foxes off their fresh meat—poor as it was it would feed the dogs—and somebody must run quickly to the village, and send help out to take the carcass home. A polar bear, which can be easily two or three times the size of a lion, is often toted home by being turned on its back and drawn along with a rope fastened through holes in its lips and around the snout. But Omialik thought this would be too much for his young companions over all that rough ice, so he allowed Akpek to choose jobs. After some argument the boys decided to hurry on with the news. Going ahead across the ridge was a terrible trial, for their nerves had been shaken, but the village offered shelter in the end; and certainly they would be safe much sooner than if they stayed out there while Omialik walked over and the other folk returned. Besides, if any more bears came about the white man could use his gun.

With their hearts in their mouths and their glances constantly darting here and there, front and back, sidewise and up and down the two lads scrambled over ridges, helter-skelter, and rushed across level patches. They did not hunt the easy

Bears

path now but made straight for home, guiding themselves by a range of high hills inland. Soon they clambered down the final hummock, and went flying across the flat ice, shouting their news long before anybody could hear:

"The Kabluna has killed a bear!"

"Omialik has shot a bear!"

When the village woke up to what was being called it burst into violent activity. Some of the men grabbed their large knives and started at once out over the ice; others waited to fetch their dogs. Akpek entertained a circle with a highly colored version of the whole affair; but Kak turned back after the crowd which was following their freshly made trail to where the hunter waited. He simply could not keep himself away from the wonder of that gun.

Omialik had been busy skinning and cutting his bear, so there was nothing left for the Eskimos to do but quickly load up each with a large piece on his back and start homeward. They made a strange procession coming over the ridge, with these bumpy bundles on their necks, dead-black against the burning sky; for the sun had set and reds and golds flamed all round the wide horizon. The Kabluna walked last carrying his long-nosed weapon. The people would not let him carry anything else. They

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saw now he was a shaman with a powerful magic that could kill a bear by pointing at it, and dear knows what else he could do, so they wanted to make everything very agreeable for him.

Only Kak and his father really understood about the bullets. The boy trudged manfully along with his share of the bear meat, keeping close to Taptuna; for when a lad has been face to face with a wild animal and in peril of his life, somehow he feels desperately fond of his father. After they were safely on the level road they began to talk about the gun.

"I'm going to learn to shoot," Kak said in his most dogged voice.

"What is the good of learning to shoot if you do not take your bow when you go among the rough ice?"

"I don't want a bow—I mean shoot a gun."

Taptuna grunted.

"I've got to go to Herschel Island and learn. . . . Shall I go to Herschel Island? . . . When can I go to Herschel Island?"

About five minutes elapsed between these questions, Kak taking his father's silence for consent.

Then Taptuna spoke. "We'll see," was all he said, which, as you doubtless understand, is a father's speech when he does not know quite what

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to say and cannot directly make up his mind. Presently he added:

"It is too far for you to go alone. Your mother could not spare you yet. But perhaps we might all travel south this summer."

"All of us!" Kak scouted the thought. "It would be heaps more fun to go with the Kabluna! Who wants Noashak tagging along!"

His father grunted and walked on silently, planning. A journey across Coronation Gulf and inland to the headwaters of the Dease River would be doubly profitable. The country there abounds in wood. Now wood is very scarce where Kak was living. No trees grow on the southwest of Victoria Island, and the prevailing winds combine with the currents in the strait to carry most of the driftwood on to the mainland. Taptuna had broken the runner on his large sled that winter, and had been terribly put about to find material for a new one. But necessity is the mother of invention in the Arctic as elsewhere—when you must do a thing for yourself you find a way to do it. Eskimos are clever about solving this sort of riddle. Taptuna mourned over the sled for a week and then, needing it badly, set about repairs. Taking a musk-ox hide, he soaked it in water, and folding it into the shape of a plank pressed it flat and even. The next step was to carry

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it outdoors and let it freeze. This of course it did in a very short time and as solid as any kind of wood; so that Taptuna was able to hew out a sled runner exactly as he would have cut one from timber. When this runner was put in place you could hardly tell the difference between the two; but the new one had a great fault. It would only serve during the cold season. When the sun shone hotly and the snow thawed, the runner would thaw too and go flop—the hide be no stiffer than the skins on their beds.

Taptuna said, "We'll see," while he was remembering this broken sleigh, and also that his whole family would need new clothes before next winter. Guninana, like most ladies, had a preference in dress; she considered deerskins the finest and softest for making garments—all their coats, shirts and trousers—everything in fact except their boots, which must be of stronger stuff; and they were sure to find numbers of caribou about Dease River in the late summer when the skins are at their best.

Since he could kill two birds with one stone—that is, supply both their acute needs on this trip, Taptuna decided to go. Kak was at first very scornful.

"Herschel Island or nothing!" he cried, and could only talk of his disappointment.

But later, when he learned that Omialik intended

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to spend part of the summer at Dease River, and heard the grown-ups planning to meet at Dismal Lake Ford, he decided father's way was not so bad after all, changed his tune completely, nearly burst with enthusiasm; and bragged about the journey as a great adventure till he made Akpek frightfully jealous.

CHAPTER V

Queer Tales

ON THE way home poor Kak walked right into some very bad luck. It was standing with open arms waiting for him; but I think if he had paid a little more heed to advice, he might have avoided the catastrophe.

This is how it happened:

The whole village got up early in the morning to say good-by to Omialik and his Eskimos, and watch them start away to the southeast where they intended to visit other tribes. As soon as this excitement was over Taptuna prepared to take his leave. They would be a party of three, for a friend called Okak, who also wanted to spend the summer at Dease River, had asked permission to travel with them; and as it would be pleasant to have another neighbor on the ice until they left, Taptuna said: "Very well, come along now."

Kitirkolak and Akpek volunteered to accompany their relatives a short distance; and this suggestion was hailed with delight. It made the first leg of

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their homeward journey a sort of joy ride, instead of sad departure.

It was a glorious, sunshiny day, windless and warm for the time of year. The dogs drew a light load, and with one man ahead to encourage them and two for managing the sleigh, both boys were free to run as they wished. Their road led south directly into the sun and seeing this, Okak, who was a timid person and believed an ounce of prevention worth several pounds of cure, put on his eye protectors at the start. Eye protectors are worn to dim the great glare of the snow, otherwise the light reflected from the whiteness all around is so fierce that one's eyes soon begin to smart and burn and water. These are the signs of snowblindness, a very painful botheration.

Taptuna soon called a halt to adjust his goggles (narrow pieces of hollow wood with a slit for each eye about big enough to slip a silver half dollar through) and Kak should have followed his example. But he hated the things. You can easily understand they are not very comfortable to use. They limit one's vision to a small line, so in order to see any object you have to look straight at it. Now in following a freshly broken trail you must watch your step, and with these goggles that means you can watch nothing but the path, which takes all the shine out of the day. Wearing eye protectors

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has about the same effect on a boy's spirits that a muzzle has on a pup's. Neither Kak nor Akpek would put them on. This was less serious for Akpek because he would only be out a short time, and did not have to face the strain of a long journey over the snow.

The cousins made great sport together, running races, playing leapfrog, now breaking a road ahead with Kitirkolak or trotting along behind; Kak boasting to his chum of all the fun he expected to have that summer.

The day was so calm and the load so light the party moved at record speed. It seemed hardly any time till Akpek's father said they were far enough from home and must turn back. Then they all stopped and got together for a last good-by, and Okak noticed the boys' uncovered eyes. He spoke of it at once:

"You'll be sorry, mark my words! Snowblindness isn't any fun. Oh, I know you don't feel it, nobody feels it till too late. Your eyes are probably strained now."

"They are not!"

Kak glared angrily at the speaker, and Akpek giggled which made his cousin's face flame scarlet. They were ready to call Okak a "fraid cat" and a "funk." Every one knew him for a nervous man,

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always fussing about something, and laughed at him for it. He was afraid of new places. It was on this account Taptuna put up with him on their journey to the mainland. He felt sure the poor fellow would be too apprehensive of trouble ever to go any place alone. Okak was scarcely a cheerful companion. He showed anxiety at every turn, and was constantly worrying for fear they would not kill seals, or catch fish, or get enough of whatever game his people happened to be living on. The boys thought him a regular old woman. Kak stuck his tongue out at Akpek to express his utter scorn of this silliness about goggles; and determined to go without them all day, "just to show him." Probably if Okak had not been so famous as a trouble hunter Taptuna would have taken the matter up; as it was the parting from his brother, looking back, hand waving and calling messages, drove the thing out of his head.

Taptuna now chose the job of running in front and Okak managed the sleigh, Kak lending a hand once in a while. The snow was mostly smooth, the dogs fresh, the men in fine spirits—just the sort of morning when it is a joy to be alive! Things went like a well-oiled machine; and Kak would have reveled in every minute of the trip, had it not been for Okak. All the time they were behind together he kept nagging and nagging the boy to put on his

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“specs.” And, of course, the more he nagged the more obstinate Kak grew, till at last he was so mad at the man, he felt he would rather endure snow-blindness than follow his advice; and in a burst of temper threw his protectors away.

Kak was young and had so far escaped this affliction. If he had guessed how much it could hurt he would certainly have been goggled from the word go.

When they camped that night, even before they finished building the house, he began to have qualms. Maybe Okak had been right about “strain.” His lids felt queer, as if they had sand under them. He winked but the sand would not go away. At supper time he was sure the lamp smoked, and examined it carefully on the quiet. There were no signs of smoke, yet his eyes smarted. Thankful for an excuse to shut them he rolled into bed early, and got some rest; but toward morning shooting pains awakened him, and these pains increased steadily till his eyes ran water. Kak’s fighting spirit, backed by shame, prevented him from complaining, though he lay suffering for hours. He pretended sleepiness when the men got up and, working this bluff, managed to loiter in the shelter of the house till the very last minute.

The boy knew now he had been no end of a fool to throw his goggles away. He hated to confess;

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dreaded Okak's remarks and his father's displeasure; and hoped against hope to be able to travel and so avoid all the fuss. By gritting his teeth he managed to start behind the sleigh. The ache was excruciating. The vast snow field glistened and twinkled with a million tiny diamonds where frost caught the sunlight, and every one of them became a little white flame that leaped into Kak's eyes and burned there. He tried not to look, keeping his glance down to the path; but for all his trying they would get into the left eye. So after a while he shut it and used only the right. That proved soothing, but it had the disadvantage of putting double strain on the working eye. Now the right one commenced to smart so badly he was obliged to shut it and keep it shut. He managed to follow with one hand on the sled, opening the left eye every thirty seconds to peep at the road. It was a very bleary, miserable business for both eyes were running water. Kak tried to shake the drops off. He knew that he was in serious trouble. What a crazy idiot he had been! He grew more and more afraid to confess, and so pegged along the best he could, blinking and winking his tears away, and suffering agony.

Of course Okak caught him at it. He was bound to catch him, for he expected this very thing.

"Stop!"

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The word of command rang through the clear air. Taptuna turned swiftly. The dogs stood panting, Kak hung his head.

"Look at that silly child. Eyes like rivers and he will not use his goggles!" Okak shrilled.

The boy jerked his head up and tried to look straight at his father; but it was no use, all the diamonds leaped into one furious white fire blinding as the heart of a furnace. He screwed his lids in a spasm.

"Put on your protectors this instant!" roared Taptuna.

Then Kak had to confess, and his father was very, very angry.

"What made you do such a stupid thing? Do you think it manly or brave? It is not even sane! I am surprised at you—behaving like Noashak! And now what are you going to wear? I cannot lead without mine—that would only mean both of us being laid up. . . . Tut, tut!"

"It isn't so bad with them shut," the sufferer answered. "If you drive more slowly, I guess I can keep along here on this smooth ground."

Kak was about as ashamed as any boy of his age could well be, for his father had said a nasty and a just thing when accusing him of behaving like Noashak. In fact he was so ashamed that for a while

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he forgot how badly his eyes hurt, or else pride made him able to pretend. They were going slowly and with both hands on the sled he stumbled along somehow. The pain grew worse and worse and floods of tears kept on running down over his cheeks. He was not crying in the ordinary way. Tears come with snowblindness. Your eyes are so sore that you simply cannot hold them back. Poor Kak had every minute to wipe his face with his mitt; and when he took one hand off the sled to do this he almost always tripped. Then Okak would say:

"There! Didn't I tell you so? If you would mind older people a little you might keep out of these troubles. But no—you are a willful boy and you have got what you deserve. You are probably in for a severe attack; and all because you would not listen to your Uncle Okak!"

This sort of conversation went all wrong with Kak. He grew angrier and angrier, and his eyes smarted worse every minute; the proof that Okak was right making him angrier still. At last he could stand the twin irritation no longer and barking out:

"Oh, do shut up! Give a chap a rest!" He sat down in the road and began to blub.

"Stop!"

Taptuna gave the word to his dogs and swung around.

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"You see how it turns out!" cried Okak. "Just as I told you."

He pointed to where Kak crouched, for the dogs had gone a short distance before stopping. "If you had made him listen to me, friend, we would have been flying along still."

Without a word Taptuna ran back to his son.

"Is it as bad as that, my boy?" he asked kindly. Okak annoyed him with his bossy I-told-you-so manner; he partly understood why Kak had thrown away his goggles.

Poor Kak was sitting in the snow with the tears streaming over his face, feeling he had not a friend in the world. He expected to be scolded, and the sound of his father's voice was such a nice surprise it broke him all up. Now he commenced to cry really.

"I've got to get home, and I can't see! I can't go any further. I'll just have to sit here and freeze. I can't stand this agony! I can't get home! . . . Boo-hoo. . . . I can't bear it!"

Don't think Kak a great cry-baby. On other occasions he had proved both brave and resourceful. Remember snowblindness is one of the most painful afflictions possible. It is not really blindness in the sense that you cannot see; but at its worst the eyes are so sore one dare not open them even for a minute

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to look at anything, and so the sufferer is practically blind.

Taptuna saw at once that Kak's eyes were in a bad way; but he did not think telling him so would help. Okak had done sufficient croaking for the whole journey; instead he said cheerfully:

"Don't you worry, old fellow, we'll get you home all right. Buck up now and take my arm and I'll lead you to the sleigh. I can make a tent for you on it so that you won't even know the sun shines."

Then Kak stumbled to where Okak waited with the team, and his father readjusted the load, making a comfortable little nest for him to lie in; and finally covered him all over with a bearskin so it was almost as dark as night. The air grew stifling hot under the fur rug, and his legs were terribly cramped, the eyes pained and still ran quarts of tears; but his father's care was so precious to him after being such a forlorn, stubborn, naughty outcast, that the boy really felt almost happy, and kept as still as a mouse, while Sapsuk and Pikalu, going at a steady walk, for the load was not so light now, covered the shining miles.

In this humble manner Kak returned from the journey on which he had started so gloriously and with such splendid company.

There is no cure for snowblindness; nothing to do

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

but grin and bear it. One sits in the house with one's head covered and gradually the pain goes away. Kak lay indoors with a blanket over his head for two days and Guninana sat beside him all the time trying to amuse him, as your mother does when you are ill. She was busy sewing, for as soon as Taptuna told her about the summer trip, she knew the family must have a good supply of water-boots, so she set to work making them from the skins of small seals. It was Kak who did most of the talking, telling every detail of their visit in the village. This pleased his mother. While she sewed she asked questions, and more questions, for she saw that thinking of his adventures helped to take the boy's mind off his pain. When Kak told Guninana the story of being chased by the polar bear she was nearly scared out of her wits; and for a minute both were so thrilled they forgot all about his trouble.

Noashak, however, did not allow them to forget long. She would come and stand beside Kak and ask:

"How do you feel now? Are you crying so much? What is it like to keep your head under the bedclothes all day? Can't you see my shadow with your eyes shut when I stand here by the lamp?"

She meant it partly in kindness, but it always started the pain, and Kak would cry:

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"Do stop talking! Do go away!"

And Noashak because she was selfish and liked to tease would not go away, but tried to crawl in beside him under the skin.

Kak shoved her off and she began to howl; so Guninana had to contrive quickly an errand to send her on just to get rid of her.

"I think it would amuse Kak if we had a party to-night and told stories," she said. "You run, Noashak, and tell Hitkoak's family and Okak to come here after supper. We will see who can tell the best story, and the one who tells the best will have a reward."

"What reward?" demanded the children in one breath.

"One of the caribou tongues that the Kabluna gave us."

"Goody! Hurrah!"

Caribou tongue is about the nicest thing Eskimos ever get to eat. The white man had saved them and repaid hospitality with a treat—like sending his hostess a box of candy.

Noashak clapped her hands and ran to spread the news, leaving her poor brother in peace. Then Kak said, "Mother, you're a trump," or the nearest thing to it in Eskimo, which made Guninana smile all over

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her face, for even parents like to know their trouble is appreciated.

Fortunately Noashak got so interested in playing with the neighbor girls she stayed over there, and did not return till they all arrived calling from the tunnel:

"We are Hitkoak and Kamik and Alannak and Katak and Noashak and Okak. We are coming in."

Eskimos have difficult names and a child may be given twenty of them like a foreign prince, but each person only uses one, without anything to indicate the family relationship.

This is the story Kamik told, and everybody agreed it took the prize.

Once upon a time a young man was lying near a pond waiting for some caribou to move away from a very open place where they had been feeding, so that he might creep up on them and shoot them with his bow and arrows. Instead of moving on the caribou lay down. At this the hunter felt terribly disappointed for he knew it meant waiting ever so much longer, and he was tired of waiting. He had just about decided to give up and go and find other caribou in an easier position, when a flock of wild geese flew over and settled on the edge of the pond. They looked pretty fluttering down from the blue sky.

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The youth watched them idly for a while, then he said to himself:

“Ah, I will have some of these geese to take home.” And he drew an arrow out of his quiver.

But before he had laid the arrow across the bow he saw a strange sight. The geese began to take off their feathers. They took them off like dresses, folded them up neatly and laid them on the shore; and as each one laid aside her downy dress she turned into a beautiful girl, and ran into the water and began to splash and swim about.

The hunter could not believe his eyes. He rubbed them hard and looked again. The girls were all in the water now having a good time. Was it possible they had flown over like geese? He did not know what to make of it, but finally he decided they were girls dressed up as geese, and he thought to himself:

“One trick deserves another; and here is a fine chance for me to play a joke.”

So he crept along very carefully without making the slightest noise till he got near enough to suddenly leap up and rush and seize their feathery dresses. When they saw him do this all the girls cried out. But the hunter only laughed and ran away. Then they called and called to him to come back and give them their clothes; they cried and pleaded. And a great number of wild geese came flying overhead,

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calling—calling. The sky was quite dark with them till the youth grew afraid and ashamed and brought back their feathers. As he handed each dress to its owner she slipped into it and was instantly a goose again, and flew away to seaward with a flock of the wild birds. The hunter, who couldn't make it out at all, stood staring after each one; while the girls who were left waited crying for their clothes, and wild wings beat overhead.

When it came to the last girl, she was so beautiful the youth decided he could not let her go.

She begged and prayed: "Oh, do let me fly away with my friends! Do let me go—do let me go!"

But the hunter said: "No. You are the most beautiful creature I have ever seen, and you must stay and be my wife."

"I do not want to be your wife! I do not want to stay!" the poor girl cried.

But he would not let her go. So the last of the geese got tired waiting for her and flew away. Then he took her to his house and she became his wife.

Now when the bird-girl had been the hunter's wife for many months she grew weary of living in the same spot. She longed to fly about in the open sky, to hover and swoop and sail, and most of all to find her lost companions; so she began to look for goose feathers, and when she found any she took

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them carefully and hid them in her house. Of course her husband knew nothing about this. While he was away hunting she used to work sewing the feathers into a dress. And finally one day, when the dress was finished, she carried it outside and put it on. At once her powerful magic turned her into a goose, and she flew to seaward.

That evening her husband returned joyfully, for he had killed three caribou. He ran calling out the good news to make her happy. But when he came into the house and found it empty and cold, all his gladness turned to bitter grief; he sat down with his face in his hands and cried. And the next morning early he went out and skinned his caribou, brought home the meat, dried it, packed enough to feed him for a long time, and started out to look for his wife.

He walked and walked and walked over the rolling hills, but he never saw anything of her at all. He looked in every pond and lake and wandered by the rivers. When he saw geese black against the sky he would crouch down quickly and call "Lirk-a-lik-lik-lik! Lirk-a-lik-lik-lik!" for that sounds like the goose call, and he hoped she might hear and relent and come back to live with him. But she never came, and he never heard anything of her.

One day the hunter's travels brought him to a mighty river on the bank of which sat a man making

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fish, adzing them out of pieces of wood and throwing them into the water. Now this man was called Kayungayuk, and he had a strong magic. You can believe it for the fish he made out of the wood swam away as soon as he threw them into the water.

The hunter, seeing this, thought: "Here is somebody who can help me." So he approached the stranger and said: "I am a poor man who is looking for his wife."

But there was no reply.

"Can you help me to find my wife?" he asked.

The man continued cutting his fish out of pieces of wood and naming them as he threw them in the water. "Be a seal," he commanded a large piece, and the wood turned into a seal and swam off. "Be a walrus," he said to the next, and it became a walrus. When he took up a handful of chips they turned into salmon. "Be a whale," he commanded his largest model, and it turned into a whale. He made all the swimming things on the flesh of which men live, and the hunter watched him.

But after a while the watcher grew impatient and said: "I will pay you if you will tell me where my wife is." He urged the man to tell, and the other did not even look up. Then the hunter offered to give him his adze if he would tell him what had become of his wife.

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The man kept right on chopping, but now he mumbled to himself: "Ulimaun. Ulimaun." (Meaning "An adze, an adze.")

So the hunter felt encouraged, and opened his tool bag which was on the ground beside him, took out his adze, and gave it to the man as a gift.

And the man said: "Your wife is tired of being a goose, she has turned back into a woman, and she is over there on the ice fishing—to the west."

Now suddenly it was winter and there was ice on the river and over the ice deep snow; but all this did not frighten the hunter for he knew Kayungayuk's magic was working; and he went into the river under the ice, which was the quickest way. When one has magic and goes into the water, one finds that the water does not reach to the bottom of the river or sea. There is a space below over which the water stretches like a tent roof—like the ice, only thicker. And so the hunter was able to walk across the river bottom under the water and the ice.

The young caribou hunter had never got over his habit of playing tricks. Because of his wife's being lost he had seemed very sad and dull for a long time; but now he was going to get her back he turned jolly again. As he walked across the bottom of the river underneath where the people were fishing, he saw all their fish hooks hanging down through

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the water, and he couldn't resist giving each hook a little tug like a fish biting—just to fool them up there. The people felt the jerks and began hauling in their lines to catch the fish. Then the hunter laughed and laughed.

He came to his wife's hook and gave it a little tug. But when she hurried to pull in her fish, he caught the hook strongly with both hands, and she pulled him up.

Kamik finished abruptly, yet her audience seemed quite satisfied; for when Eskimos come to the end of their yarns they stop, without bothering to add our traditional phrase: "And they lived happy ever after."

CHAPTER VI

Summer Travels

As soon as Kak's eyes were strong enough to stand sunlight he joined his father and the other men in the great spring seal hunt. This is the time of year when the Eskimos store seal oil for their next winter's supply, and killing sufficient animals to fill the bags with oil means keeping at the hunting early and late. Taptuna was a provident man; that is while the sun shone hotly on his bare head, making the sweat run down his neck, he could still remember how winter felt; how dark it was for hunting then, and how cold, and that the season would surely come again. He and Guninana both felt happier about going south for the summer when they knew that several full bags of oil were awaiting their return. Which is much the same as our liking to have next winter's coal put into the cellar in April.

An oil bag is made by skinning a seal through the mouth, commencing at the lips and turning the skin backward over the head and neck and body as one might turn a sock inside out. By leaving the flippers

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on unskinned, openings are avoided, and the "poke" is tied at the mouth. When they had made and filled enough bags Taptuna began to pack up. This proved a simple business, for there were no trunks to put things in, and awfully few things to put. Their best winter clothing, the heaviest fur blankets, large cooking pots, wooden food platters, lamps, and oil containers they could spare during the summer; but he was too canny to leave anything behind on that exposed coast where bears prowl continually, when it was possible to take the load with them and cache it among the small islands of Coronation Gulf, which is one of the safest places in the whole Arctic. Polar bears come into the gulf so seldom that many middle-aged people who have spent their lives there have never even seen one.

The first stage of their journey promised anxious moments, for it lay over the ice bridging the dangerous waters of Dolphin and Union Straits. Through this twenty-mile channel, dividing Victoria Island from the mainland, the current runs like a mill race. You doubtless know that running water is always the last to freeze and the first to thaw; the ice is never as thick here as in other places; and late in the spring (it was now May) might not be any too strong to bear a loaded sled. Breaking through the ice and taking a cold plunge into the

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chilly water underneath is far from pleasant, even when the sun remains shining nearly all night to dry by. Such accidents do happen, however, and on the edge of a floe, where there is little danger except from the wetting, may cause a lot of laughter as the unfortunate victim is pulled out. But to go through into the straits was an entirely different affair. That swiftly racing, cruel tide below would carry a man like a chip, and whirl him instantly, with his first cry for help on his lips, to the black doom of the airless ocean under the ice.

Taptuna decided to travel by night for two reasons: not only would the ice be better, but he was using his damaged sleigh with the musk-ox runner, and had to be very careful that the sun's rays did not beat on it and thaw out the hide. Every morning when they stopped to camp and sleep, it was his custom to bank snow around the frozen skin plank, so that the summer warmth could not penetrate. He also laid skins on top of the sleigh, making for it a sort of tent; and after sunrise he hung these skins over the edge of the sunny side so that his faked runner slid along in cool shade.

The first stop was to be at Lambert's Island in the middle of the straits, which is a good camping place because of the driftwood there. Rather than strike out over the ice at once the chief guide led his

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party in a gentle diagonal from the coast. He walked ahead testing their way every now and then with his pick. Sea ice is not like the fresh-water ice we skate on; instead of being brittle it is elastic, and gives the traveler warning when not strong enough to hold him by bending as he walks over it. Guninana and Noashak came second, while Kak drove the dogs; and Okak, very much scared by the whole adventure, ambled along behind in what he considered the safest place; reasoning that if the load went over the ice would surely be strong enough to bear him. He had not the courage to try imagining what would happen if the load broke through.

Taptuna smiled at this anxiety. He had thought out a scheme for their guidance and was quite sure it would work. At this time of year the caribou migrate in bands from the mainland northward. One day, when he was after seals, he had watched several of these picking their way across the straits. They approached slowly in a very zigzag course, but all got over without any accident so far as he could see. The Eskimo said to himself: "Where they go we can go." And now he led his family east till they came to the fresh tracks of a good-sized band; by following these to the island, and next evening picking up another track to guide them to the main-

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land, they were able to cross without any trouble at all.

They camped again, and next afternoon, under a cloudy sky, made good way past Cape Krusenstern. Taptuna welcomed the clouds; they saved him from protecting his sled runner and afforded greater freedom in the hours of travel. By morning the party had reached their little island, made their cache, and were all ready for a good, long sleep.

Everybody rolled out to dinner in wonderful spirits. With their load lightened by half, traveling turned into a lark. A few hours over this solid, smooth bay ice would bring them to Rae River—a pleasant prospect. Guninana smiled, thinking how easy it would be there to go out and get a nice breakfast of fish, and maybe a dinner of fish, and after that a supper of fish in the Eskimo fashion; for these northern folk generally live on one thing at a time, and that the game most readily caught where they may happen to be. Taptuna relaxed, threw his sense of responsibility to the winds and played tag with his children; and Okak came back from a state of blanched fear to his natural color.

Owing to these high jinks they were tired before starting, and it proved to be quite a few miles to Rae River, for their island lay at the outer edge of the group. On they toiled through the gathering gloom,

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growing more and more weary. Noashak had long ago demanded a ride and was sprawled out over the load, fast asleep. Even her mother felt done.

"We must be nearly there," she sighed.

"I can see the river now, beyond the rocks yonder," Okak answered.

"No rocks here!" grunted Taptuna.

"Then what are those shadowy things?"

Okak pointed, but the chief guide was too fed up with his friend's fancies to bother about them.

"You are always frightening yourself with shadowy things," Guninana said. "Probably that river you see is a streak in the sky."

They walked on in silence after that till Kak suddenly stopped.

"I see rocks," he cried. "One—two—three. . . . Wolves and foxes! They're not rocks, they're tents!"

This was a most exciting discovery. No one had expected to find a village at the river's mouth, but they welcomed it with joy. People camped here must be friendly, acquaintances by reputation anyhow. News travels slowly in the north, but very surely. Everybody hears everything sooner or later. Their jaded spirits soared in happy anticipation as they hurried on.

Dead silence greeted the party; not a sound nor

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a motion came from those tents. Evidently the inhabitants had all gone to bed early on account of the darkness. In this part of the country this time of year it is broad daylight always during fair weather, and a cloudy evening offers an excellent chance to catch up on one's lost sleep. The only signs of life about the village were the dogs. Some lay curled on the ground following their masters' example, and others prowled to and fro. Eskimo dogs are the worst watch dogs in the world: no good at all on the job. They never bark and they are generally chummy with travelers. These dogs proved no exception to the rule. As soon as they smelled the strangers they came out wagging their tails and making all sorts of friendly advances; not giving so much as one little "wow" of warning. If Taptuna and Okak had wanted to they could have crept into the tents and killed everybody.

Being awake and up and dressed the newcomers had decidedly the advantage in position; and yet Okak was so crazy frightened at the thought of bad Eskimos, he trembled like an aspen and nagged to "Come away." Taptuna, laughing, strode on.

"Visitors are here!" he called. "Visitors are here!"

Still the people slept.

Kak was already unharnessing. Being so tired

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he wanted to get ahead with the work and reckoned on tired dogs behaving themselves. But they were hungry dogs, too. Freed from his leash Sapsuk threw up his nose and sniffed once. A strong smell of fresh fish, which he loved, perfumed the air. He sniffed again and dashed up-wind toward the source. Because he was going lickity-split up the wind, through twilight, and paying very little heed to where he went, he landed squarely on one of the sleeping village dogs before the stranger got a whiff of him. It is hard to say which of the two was the more surprised. However, there is no question which was the angrier. The under cur gave a growl like a wolf, swung his long jaw around and bit Sapsuk's heel.

Kak's favorite was no pup to stand liberties. He let a squeal out of him rousing all inhabitants, canine and human, and closed on his enemy.

Dogs leaped from their dreams. Dogs whirled in on every side. They barked now and bit, too. They rushed at each other and snarled and snapped and pawed and nipped. Every dog is always spoiling for a fight. They never waited to ask what it was about, but fell on the nearest animal tooth and claw; while Sapsuk and the stranger in the middle of the mix-up fought like demons. There was yapping

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and yowling and growling enough for a menagerie gone mad.

In about two seconds all the men came tumbling out half-dressed to see what the row meant. The children followed naked. They don't have pajamas to sleep in, only fur blankets, and they just jumped up and ran as they were, calling:

"What's the matter?"

"Who is it?"

"What's struck 'em?"

The more Puckish urged on the fight with: "Go it, Scruffy!" "Lick into him, Taliak!" and cheers for their own side.

You would have whistled your dog off, but Eskimos cannot whistle. It is an unknown art up north; so the men threw themselves into the mêlée and began hauling the beasts apart by main force. Never before was such a tumult! Kak and Taptuna ran for Sapsuk, calling: "We're friends! We have no knives!" All the people talked at once and cried aloud while the dogs snarled and snapped. The women yelled to the children: "Come out of it! Come here!" trying to drag them from under their fathers' feet, till the children cried also; and Pikalu, still harnessed and held by Guninana, split her ears with barking.

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It was a very unfortunate introduction, and all Kak's fault.

When they got the fight stopped and the infuriated animals tied up the people had time to worry about themselves. The village was quite as much frightened at these strangers dashing out of the twilight this way as Okak was of the village. However, as soon as Taptuna found a minute's peace to announce himself they knew who he was and welcomed the whole party.

With everybody so excited there seemed no use trying to sleep; so the visitors were escorted each to a different tent, and sat up the rest of the night telling adventures and swapping yarns. Going to bed at dawn was the same to them as sleeping in the night, for they had no offices, or schools, or shops opening at any hour; there is no setting clocks back, and no daylight-saving to make people get up early—the sun attends to that himself in the Arctic summer. Sometimes, however, he slacks on the job. Next morning he stayed behind the clouds, and it must have been late afternoon when Kak struggled out to take a look over their new world.

Nobody was about. The village lay sleeping it off. Kak thought: "Now's the time to spear a few fish."

This open river offered so much better chance of

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getting them than through the ice, work became sport. He waded in his waterproof boots, dry and warm. Although it was spring, and hot while the sun shone, and the river rushing to the gulf had swept the ice away from the shore at its mouth, the stream still felt icy cold. Snow lay on the ground, a few flakes sifted down out of the gray clouds, and the straits, as we know, were frozen over.

While Kak waded around with the water burbling above his ankles or up to his knees, intent on his task and enjoying fair success, somebody called out:

“Say! That’s no way to catch fish!”

Now Kak considered himself a pretty good fish spearer. Out of one corner of his eye he had glimpsed this meddling stranger approaching and the last jab or two had been made with a fine flourish in a desire to show off. So the look he shot answering the taunt was far from friendly.

The boy on the river bank only laughed. He was enormously fat, a rare sight among Eskimos, and Kak was so amused, once he got a straight look at him, he forgot to be annoyed. Besides, the boy, instead of sending black glances in return, kept on smiling. It is extremely difficult to remain angry with people who smile. Remember this and try it sometimes. In a minute Kak was smiling also, but when the boy called, “I can show you a trick worth

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two of that!" it made him feel sore again, as if his personal skill were being challenged. He jabbed viciously and pulled out a big fish, just to establish his self-respect, and tossing it on to the bank asked:

"How's that?"

"Bully! But why ever don't you set nets?"

Copper Eskimos never use fish nets; Kak had never seen one. In fact he scarcely understood what the stranger meant, and to cover his ignorance he pretended not to hear. The fat boy raised his voice:

"Say, why don't you set nets? This looks too much like work for me! You'll be all day getting your breakfast. Come along down to the beach and I'll catch you some fish."

It sounded horribly boastful and patronizing, but the words stirred Kak's curiosity more than his pride; so caching his fish under a couple of stones, he shouldered his spear and followed the stranger.

Kommana, for that was the boy's name, picked up a kayak from the shore and turning it over his shoulder, as you would carry a canoe, brought it to the water. Then he proceeded to get into it. The kayak is a long, narrow boat completely decked with skin except for a round hole at the middle large enough for the owner to sit in. This boy was so bulging fat he could barely squeeze into his father's boat, and he looked so funny doing it, and made



HE COULD BARELY SQUEEZE INTO HIS FATHER'S BOAT.

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such silly faces at himself, Kak laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. He was secretly rather impressed by Kommana, who was some years older than himself, and thought he had never met anybody so independent. With everything shipshape the fat boy pushed off and paddled to where a row of wooden floats strung themselves across the river's mouth. Here he stopped, pulled up a few feet of fish net and commenced to empty it. The numbers and size of the fish that came tumbling out made Kak open his eyes.

Kommana let them all flop back into the water as if they were of no value, and finally, when he had tired showing off, he grabbed a few, strung them on a line, swung this over the side of his boat, and paddled to shore.

Kak ran to meet him crying: "Go on, go on! Why don't you take them all?"

His new friend only grinned. "Not on your life! I don't work unless I have to; I was just fooling to show you. Presently they will drag the nets to shore and get the lot. Want these?" He held the catch out to Kak, and while the other's eyes were gloating over it, yawned and stretched. "Guess I'll go in and have a little more sleep. The village will be waking up soon, and they're so beastly active. So long! See you again sometime."

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Dismissed in this cool manner Kak went bounding back to his own camp.

"Look! Look!" he cried, as he threw his mess of fish on the floor. "I've seen the most marvelous thing!" And he began to tell in excited gasps about the nets. "All these the boy took by merely putting his hand into the water. We must have a net! We must buy a net right away."

Taptuna shook his head, and Guninana laughed.

"I guess the old way will do us, son," she said. "The way your fathers did is a good enough way, don't you think? And you such a wonder at it, too!"

But Kak was not to be silenced with compliments. "This is so quick," he insisted. "The fish swim into it while you sleep, and in the morning you get them. It is no trouble at all."

"There's plenty of work about setting a fish net," his father objected.

And Okak added: "Where there are several sharing together, look out for quarrels."

But Kak would not be satisfied till Taptuna promised to go after breakfast and watch the village clearing the nets. It really was watching the village, for the whole place, all the men and nearly all the women, turned out together. Their day's job consisted in dragging the nets and emptying them. Some worked in groups and some in families, while

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hundreds of fish were piled and scattered on the beach, coldly reflecting the wan sunlight struggling through a thick white fog. Taptuna saw it all and was certainly impressed. But seeing and doing are entirely different things with an Eskimo. They are what we call a conservative people; that is, they stick to their old habits. They are terribly conservative; Kak's father was terribly conservative here.

"This is an easy way," he said, "but it looks to me common and stupid. There is no skill about it. We cannot store fish on our travels; and we will be able to provide with our spears all we need to eat."

Kak felt bitterly disappointed. He had hoped his father would trade for a fish net and allow him to use it at Dease River. There was a sneaking desire in his heart to show off before the Kabluna. However, at that moment Kommana passed with a couple of dogs hitched to a sled and turned his mind into other channels.

"There's my friend, dad."

Taptuna laughed. The ungainly figure waddling about in a ragged suit of old skin clothes made him think of a mangy young musk-ox more than anything else. "That fellow, eh? Well, he looks as if he ought to catch his food by the pailful."

Kak doubled up with mirth. "Where are you off to?" he shouted between gurgles.

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

"Wood," the animated mountain answered gloomily.

"I'll go along and help if we can have part of the load."

"Suits me. Follow on."

Kommana accepted this offer gladly, counting on Kak to fag while he managed the dogs. Besides he loved company. It was rough going and hard pulling at first; but when they got away from the river mouth they turned on to the flat ice and ran about a mile; then they turned in again to the beach.

"All the best wood has been picked up nearer the river, and it is such a beastly nuisance coming so far for it," the fat boy explained as he sat down on the sleigh to rest.

"What do you want to rest for?" Kak demanded. "You've only just got out of bed! Why, we haven't started yet!"

"Oh, well, I'm tired. I'm always pretty tired."

The stranger drew a bit of frozen fish out of his coat and began to nibble. "Want some?" he asked; but Kak declined. He had come to gather wood. Gathering wood amused him; it was not a job he had to do at home.

"I'll gather and you load," he called. And soon a grand pile was flung up beside the sled.

The fat boy sat nibbling fish and giving orders:

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"There's a fine log yonder . . . hoist it with a lever. . . . Yo-ho—she's off! . . . See that swell slab by the ice hummock. . . . No, don't bring those dinky pieces, they're such a bother to load and unload, and you know I'm particular about not doing any more light work than I have to."

Kak might have resented this sort of thing only the other boy laughed and winked and made fun the whole time, and kept him laughing as well as working.

"Come and help me rest," he suggested after a while. "You will be getting overheated, kid."

That was true, and it is a bad thing to get overheated, so Kak sat down.

"Beastly time of year!" Kommana grumbled. "Tell me what it's like up north in your island! Does it keep cool at all seasons?"

"No—it's hot in summer."

"Oh, gee! I do hate summer!" the fat boy groaned. "You'll have a rotten time going south. Nothing but flies, flies, flies, and your clothes sticking to your body with heat as you get farther inland; and food scarce on the prairies. Say, I wouldn't walk across there, not if my life depended on it!"

"I shan't mind," Kak replied stoutly. "Omialik is to be at Dismal Ford."

Kak, the Copper Eskimo

That made Kommana jump. He shot a keen glance at his companion, asking: "Who?"

"One of my friends—he's a Kabluna."

Kak sounded so magnificent the other lad was suddenly faced with a dilemma; whether to let his new friend score over him and brag, or confess his own duplicity. As he had already reaped the pleasure of the morning's display he decided it would be most fun to prick Kak's lofty attitude, so he cried:

"Hoh! The explorer—he's been here! That's where we got the fish nets. I knew no more about fishing with nets a few days ago than you did last night. He taught me how to make 'em, too."

Kak felt considerably dashed, but tried to recover his form by telling how he intended to go to Herschel Island and learn to shoot.

"It's too far for me," sighed Fatty. "Too much effort. The rest of the village does all my hunting and keeps me in meat because of the bowls and pails and plates I can chop from this very driftwood."

"Oh, can you!" said the younger boy, getting a new line on his companion and more impressed than ever.

"Yes, I can make the chips fly—but I won't ever be anything of a traveler myself. Still, I like to hear you talk. Tell me about that ugrug you killed."

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This request tickled Kak's vanity and made his heart skip a beat. He was going to tell about it anyway, but being asked so unexpectedly gave him a thrill.

"How did you know?" he managed to stammer.

"Okak was at our house last night—he thinks you're some pup! Say, would you believe it! I got out of my bed early to go and see this famous ugrug killer, and I—ha-ha!—I—ha-ha!—I found him spearing little fishes!"

Kommana thought this a tremendous joke and went off into peals of laughter, holding his shaking sides. But Kak was hardly so pleased. To change the subject he dashed right into the ugrug story and told it as fast as he could; and after that he told about his house building, and then about the white bear. By the time all his stories were done it was growing dark and Kommana said they had better leave the load. But Kak would not hear of that, so he pitched in and piled, while the fat fellow stood around and told him how, moving a stick now and again, and patting the dogs. Finally when the load was up and they were ready to start for home Kak had done all the work and all the entertaining, and Kommana had only sharpened his wits and enjoyed life. On their way back, however, he made Kak an offer.

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"If you'll bring me a cracker-jack piece of spruce," he said, "a real good, wide slab to make a snow shovel, I'll get my dad to give you one of the pups out of our last litter."

Kak's eyes sparkled. "Honor bright?"

"Honor bright. They're fine pups, too; but I've been looking for a piece broad enough to make a shovel for three years."

"You've as good as got it in your hand," the Copper Eskimo replied. "I've been wanting a dog of my own for ever so long!"

CHAPTER VII

Twenty-four Hours of Sunlight

“W_{HOO}PS! Look at the sleigh, dad! Look at it for a wreck!”

Kak stormed down on his father with these cheerful words as the latter returned from fishing.

The party had been delayed at Rae River, Noashak was feverish; she lay on her bed for a week and took no interest in anything, while her parents worried over her and over this hitch in their plans. If they were held up long it was likely to place them in serious difficulty, for they had to cross another large river before turning south on the prairie, and with no boat to carry inland they must cross by the bay ice at its mouth. Spring had begun in earnest here; the snow was melting rapidly. Warm water pouring down every stream and rill and all along the banks ran out over the ice and melting formed channels, which flowed themselves like little rivers seeking their outlet by way of the tide cracks. They ran in all directions, wearing away the softer ice and leaving wet bumps and hummocks sticking up be-

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tween. The tide cracks, which are always found in ice near the shore and are caused, as their name suggests, by the action of the tides, instead of being several inches wide, were worn away to three or four feet. Hauling a loaded sleigh across these and over this wet irregular surface was sure to prove a pretty severe business. Guninana dare not start with a sick child.

A stubborn spell of glum and sulky weather setting in saved their lives. Noashak recovered during the second week. She was able to be out when a stiff wind, springing up in the night, at last blew the clouds off, and allowed the sun to rise into a bare sky. It rose so early and shone so long and so fiercely all the ice patches melted, and the snow vanished as if by magic. Taptuna's home-made, musk-ox runner began to look ill about six o'clock. The little girl had watched it anxiously as it grew softer and softer, and finally doubled down under the weight of the frame and lay sodden and sad on the wet ground.

"That's your finish!" Kak promised. "You'll have to leg it along now. No more rides on top of the load—how will you like it, sis?"

Noashak tossed her head. "I can't walk—I am sick! Daddy'll arrange something," she added confidently.

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Later she watched the faces of the older people gathered around the useless sleigh.

"Daddy, I can't walk," she wheedled, shoving her little hand into his.

"Don't you worry," he said, pulling her ear affectionately while she rubbed against him. "Kak and Kommana and I are going to fix up a runner good enough to get us around the river mouth. Run, boy, and tell your friend if he whirls in and helps he can have the old sled for his trouble; we'll cache it for him down the coast."

Kak darted off; Taptuna turned to the others.

"I've had a look at the bay and we've got to leave to-night or give up. One more day like this will mean open water all along the shore."

Kak soon came back bringing his chum. Kommana thought it a good bargain, though the sleigh was very old; he agreed to do his bit and for a wonder worked, boring holes vigorously till the sweat dripped from his nose and chin. By supper time they had knocked up a substitute runner and everything was packed and ready. After they had eaten, the whole village turned out to see them off, with hearty good will and pleased anticipation of their return with the first autumn snow.

The journey started by a long slow drag over bare ground before the ice bridged the open water

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from the Rae River and gave them a chance to get out on to the bay. It was hard for everybody; the men and Kak had to help the dogs pull, and Noashak walked with her mother's hand. Once they touched the ice however, Taptuna packed his small girl in behind the load where a nest had been left for her and where she could be kept dry. She did not find it very comfortable being hauled from hummock to hummock with the men wading up to their knees, dragging the sled out of one rill, over a bump of harder ice, and down across another rill; always having to be careful it did not slip sidewise and dump the passenger into a couple of feet of water. Still, it was better than trying to walk on her short legs. They were all cheerful about their trouble and had lots of fun, roaring with laughter when either of the team slid off the ice into the water and had to swim for it, as frequently happened, for Eskimo dogs are not very tall.

Occasionally they found good going for a few miles when the thaw water had all run off into some neighboring crack, and the surface was fairly even and nearly dry. But after they passed the Richardson River and tried to work nearer the shore, their difficulties increased every minute. Taptuna began to be anxious; Okak was in a blue funk; and even Guninana, the cheerful, cast many a glance at the

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brightening sky. If they could not find an ice bridge to the shore before sunrise, their chances of making it at the end of another long, sweltering, Arctic day would be considerably less. At last they came to a stretch where the ice did close in to the shore.

"It's rotten, absolutely rotten!" Okak almost wept.

"We've got to try it just the same," Taptuna said.

He looked significantly eastward. The sky already crimsoned, the weather promised hot and clear. Out on the gulf the sea ice, though rough, was thick enough and safe enough; here shore water had eaten it away above and below till it was dangerously thin. Taptuna gazed longingly toward the land rising from the remains of a solid old pressure ridge still lying on the beach firm and inviting. He felt impelled to risk crossing—though he knew it was a risk for both themselves and the sleigh.

They debated the question; Okak was strongly negative.

"Don't try it, don't try it! Let us go farther on—we may come to a better bridge."

"And we may not find any at all. There is the Coppermine River south," Guninana answered.

"That's true." Taptuna fell into a deep silence gazing carefully up and down the coast.

"This is as good as any place," he decided. "I'm

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going to try. You and Noashak had better come along with me; Kak can drive the dogs, and Okak steady the sleigh behind."

"We'll be drowned! We'll certainly be drowned! Oh, what will become of us?" moaned Okak.

"We'll be drowned!" piped Noashak.

Amid this dismal chorus the three started picking their way to shore. Noashak had to be lifted across all the deep places, and it took time, yet the going was better than Taptuna expected. As soon as he had landed the child safely on the old ridge he turned back to help with the sleigh.

Meantime Okak had persuaded Kak into crossing a little farther on where the ice looked smoother, reasoning if it were smoother they could move faster and so would be less likely to go through. Sound enough sense in its way, if they had not happened to choose the thinnest part of the whole bridge. Taptuna took in the position at a glance and watched, horrified. He could see the ice bending under them, and dashed up shore, followed by Guninana. The load had but one chance now—to keep moving.

"Come on, Kak!—ahead of the dogs!" he yelled. "Rush it. Okak, hold back there—farther! Farther back! Right away from the sled!"

Kak was in his element. His eyes snapped and his heart bounded.

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"Hok!—Hok!—Hok!" he cried to his team. Everybody broke in with yells and cheers.

The light sleigh went banging and bumping over the rough surface, taking its chances, for Okak was too scared to be much good at his office. His place behind had turned out the worst rather than the best, yet he clung to it. Mad with fear at realizing he would be the last to land, he kept pace with the team, flinging his weight on to ice already strained and bending under the load. The feel of it bending drove him daffy. He mixed up this quiet shore water with his recent dread of the straits, saw himself going through to certain death, and lost the remnant of his wits. Instead of holding back as Taptuna cried at him, he pitched forward, clutching the only solid thing in sight.

Kak landed with a flying jump. The runners were already half over on firm ice, when a shriek of mortal terror rent the air. The jar of Okak's hands falling on the sleigh had been a last straw. Down went the back end into the water with him clinging to it like a limpet.

Taptuna understood his companion so well now he had foreseen this—was expecting disaster. At the same instant Okak grabbed for the load he grabbed for the dogs, and was hauling them on when Kak alighted. For a moment the sleigh teetered on

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the edge of the solid ice; then Guninana and the boy, screaming wildly, threw themselves each over a runner, clung to them, pressed them down. That day's hasty repairs tore away with a splintering crash; but the chief guide had control by then. Their combined weight heaved the stern out of the water with Okak still aboard. He was blowing like a bow-head whale and quite insane from fright.

A long pull and a strong pull altogether with the dogs dragged their neighbor and their goods to safety; and then Kak and his mother dropped on the ground and laughed till they could laugh no more. Tennis flannels and evening clothes are funny when sopping wet, but for real class neither of them can hold a candle to a fur suit! Okak resembled nothing on earth but a half drowned pup. He was a small man to begin with, and the hair and hide of his loose garments now fitted like his skin. He stood with chattering teeth and dripping locks, a sort of human spigot, while his four friends made the welkin ring.

"Ha—ha—ha—ha!"

"He—he—he!"

"Oh—ho—ho—ho!"

Sight of the poor chap slopping around shivering and trying to pull his wet shirt over his head at last touched a soft spot in Guninana's heart. She



HE STOOD WITH CHATTERING TEETH AND DRIPPING LOCKS.

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shut Taptuna up, gave Noashak a poke to make her stop, and turned to Kak.

"Go, you two, and gather driftwood. Don't you see our walrus needs a fire?"

They dashed away with a chuckle and a shout, while Taptuna worked off his humor unlashng the load. They would have to stay here a couple of days to dry out their things, but that would be a rest for Noashak, so no one minded. Kak built a dandy bonfire; his father lugged their goods up on top of the bank into the sunshine. Okak, wearing borrowed clothes, pitched the tent, and Guninana cooked breakfast. Considering they were, in a sense, shipwrecked on a barren spot where none of them had the least desire to linger, they made a wonderfully jolly camping party of it. Okak got a good deal of teasing about his bath; but as he was the best tempered man in the world, when not frightened or worried, he laughed at himself, enjoyed their jokes, cracked others, and even showed a slight spirit of vainglory over having done something to bring him into such prominence. Kak marveled at this and stored it in his memory for Akpek.

"Wouldn't it make a wolf laugh!" he said to his parents later. "Poor old Okak doesn't know he's a joke!"

"Perhaps it is better to be a joke than not to be

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noticed at all. Every man cannot expect to excel in this publicity business as you do. Okak has never been a hero," Taptuna replied, winking at Guninana.

Kak took the speech seriously, straightened up, threw out his chest, and said in a patronizing tone: "No, and I guess he never will be."

The whole family burst into roars of laughter.

When the boy found they were making fun of him he did not take it half so well as Okak. He felt cheap and comic and knew he ought to laugh; but he was angry instead of amused, and that made him feel mean; then he was angrier still, so he went out and played with the dogs.

The travelers turned in right away, and when they waked up, after a long sleep, all the things they had laid out under the fierce sun were bone-dry. Noashak, too, seemed none the worse for her rough journey. She looked like a morning flower; and seeing these good signs, Taptuna said they would continue at once.

"Hurrah!"

Kak cut a caper, jumped over Sapsuk's back and then over Pikalu's, turned a handspring and mired down on the oozy ground. Despite the pessimist he was all eagerness to explore that vast inland rolling southward as far as the eye could see. Kommana's

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horror of the prairie found no echo in the boy's soul. He was far too hardy to be upset by the promise of a few difficulties. Poof! Mosquitoes and flies raged everywhere at this time of year, and it was hot all over. Taptuna's family had so rarely suffered for food that Kak only half believed in hunger, while wholly yielding to the lure of the unknown. This country they were about to cross and invade held two great, romantic possibilities—grizzly bears and Indians! Both thrilled him with terror and anticipation.

Since seeing Omialik kill the polar foe with his magic gun, Kak had lost some of his respect for that deadly enemy. Still, bears are bears, and everybody in the Arctic circle believes that a grizzly, when angered, is the fiercest of this powerful family. Kak yearned and dreaded to meet one of these big, brown bears. He could shut his eyes and see the huge beast rearing up before him, twice his own height, tawny-colored, shaggy, long-nosed, all teeth and claws and matted hair; could see himself tackling the brute single-handed, plunging his knife in under the fore-leg. . . . Hunters do tackle them single-handed with a knife; but Kak had once met a man whose eye had been clawed out by a grizzly, and so at that point the vision usually faded in a wild surge of funk.

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Indians were not so definite to the boy's imagination. They fascinated him more while frightening him quite as much. Eskimos are the natural enemies of all Indians. For centuries the Mackenzie River Eskimos maintained an aggressive attitude toward their red-skinned neighbors; but with Kak's people fear was divided half and half. The two races rarely encountered each other. When the snow had disappeared, while the lakes were still frozen, it was the Indians' custom to cross on the ice and make their yearly trading trip to the Hudson's Bay post on Great Bear Lake. So when the Eskimos arrived at Dease River most of the Slavey Indians were three hundred miles away. Occasionally, however, stray bands ran across each other with dire results. Stories of Indians attacking tents in which Eskimos slept and killing them all had been part of Kak's education. The possibility of seeing Indians made the second thrill of this amazing summer; while over all hung the certainty of meeting Omialik again and learning a whole lot more about Kablunat. At marching orders the boy went leaping and hurrahing around like a mad thing; and supplied a pair of willing hands when it came to packing up.

Their entire store of dried meat was put into saddlebags slung over the dogs' backs; and the tent poles were tied to the harness so that their long ends

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dragged behind. This seems an awkward kind of load for poor Sapsuk and Pikalu, but nobody expected to go more than about two miles an hour, so it was easy for them to keep up with the party. Guninana carried her cooking pots very carefully rolled in bedding skins, her ulu (a little knife, like a chopping knife, for preparing food) and her sewing kit. Taptuna and Okak carried their bows and arrows, their tool bags, which were heavy, and some fragments of copper that might come in handy for making new arrows to replace those lost in the hunt. Kak had his bow and arrows, and to show what a man he was, insisted on carrying the tent besides. They all wore their oldest clothes. Old clothes are much the most comfortable at this time of year, for the hair being rubbed off makes them cooler; also if they are gone into holes in places, as Kak's were, little breezes can trickle in and cool the skin; when the thermometer stands at about a hundred degrees, cooling winds are welcome. Unfortunately though, sunshine and hot weather bring insects. Along with the little breezes mosquitoes come, "biz, biz, biz," and settle on the holes and bite like fury.

"Ouch!" Kak would cry, clapping his hand on elbow or knee, and desperately fanning the host away.

Mosquitoes are not the worst pests in the Arctic

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either. They only came poking their noses into the holes and biting him a few times on that spot. Later on he would have to endure sand flies. Once these find an opening and buzz into it they never go out again, but creep up the arms and down the legs and crawl and itch till their victim dances in agony.

I want you to try to picture the party coming up over a crest of the rolling prairie: the dogs clattering their awkward gear on either side, the people, all in their loose, old, baggy clothes, all but Noashak bending a little under their loads, and all swishing right and left, left and right, with willow branches or loon skins at the cloud of insects following them.

"Swish, swish, swish." "Biz, biz, biz, biz, biz." "Swish." "Biz, biz, biz, biz." "Swish, swish." "Biz, biz, biz, biz, biz, biz."

So the chorus kept up from waking to sleeping, the army of flies numbering about a million to one and getting quite the best of it.

Kak trudged on manfully ahead of the others, keeping up with his father; sometimes stopping to fit an arrow and take a shot at a bird or small animal, and always with his eye open for the dreaded grizzly bear. Game abounded. Taptuna killed a caribou right at the start and they feasted on it, carrying the fresh meat with them. They were faring well, yet the farther they went inland the

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hotter it grew, till Guninana panted under her load of bedding as they toiled up a sharp incline to pitch camp. Okak always insisted on choosing the highest point for camping.

"You never know when or from where the Indians may come!" he repeated every evening; a speech that thrilled Kak, and made Taptuna smile, though he humored it.

"Much easier to spy out caribou from a hill," he allowed.

And Guninana sighed: "There may be a breeze on the high ground and that will mean fewer mosquitoes."

So far they had found excellent camping places with plenty of loose stones lying about to use as tent pegs weighting the flaps; and quantities of heather for cooking; but the increasing heat made their day's march dreadfully tiresome and uncomfortable. At last it proved too much even for Okak.

"It's sheer waste of effort to lug this extra food. We could go twice as fast without," he said, removing the heavy bags of dried meat from Pikalu's back. The poor dog laid himself on the ground panting. His eyes were swollen almost shut and his feet lame from mosquito bites all around where the hair joined the pad. The whole family gathered to consider his plight.

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"Poor old fellow!" Kak stroked him gently.

"Looks to me as if there was going to be plenty of game," Okak continued, "and if we cached this stuff here we could let the dogs run light."

Taptuna stood plunged in deep thought. It was his wise and safe custom to carry extra food across any region where scarcity had ever been rumored; but on the other hand they were moving slowly, he did not want to miss Omialik at the ford, and if the dogs petered out it would delay them still further. Sapsuk was in better condition only because Kak had taken care of him, swishing for his favorite as well as himself. Things could not go on thus. The ease with which they were getting supplies amazed him; and most of all he felt impressed by the fact of Okak's overcoming his habitual fears far enough to make such a suggestion.

After considerable grave pondering the chief guide said: "That is a good idea of yours, neighbor. We will cache the meat here for our return journey. Pikalu and Sapsuk shall carry their poles and the fresh game."

Unfortunately they dared not trust the bedding to the dogs, for in a lake country such as they were crossing the animals constantly splash into the water to cool off, and drag their saddlebags with them.

All hands turned to gathering stones for the cache.

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They had a jolly time there, cooking over a fire of heather, eating their food off the rocks, and burning smudges to drive the pests away. Really it was a camping party such as you would enjoy if you went into the wilds at the same time of year. Only for them the sun just disappeared below the horizon for a few minutes every twenty-four hours and it was always bright daylight.

They broke camp and started about ten o'clock at night in order to have the coolest time for traveling. All were in high spirits and very cheery. Kak with only his bow and arrows to handle felt like a king. During the sun-lit night he shot several sper-mophile, small animals something like prairie dogs, and bringing them home made him feel a conqueror as well.

They supped and breakfasted off Kak's prize, nobody felt a bit badly about not having more. Now they had decided to travel light, all they wanted was just enough to eat, nothing to pack. Pikalu had recovered some of his lost pep and the party were in splendid feather.

"Push ahead! Push ahead!" they sang for slogan.

"It won't be any time till we join Omialik," Kak chuckled.

Taptuna hoped to get a caribou that day or the next, but he did not see any; nor the following day

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either; nor the next after that. His eyes, instead of peering alertly, now began to look strained. He rose early, leaving Kak and Okak to break camp, and went off to stalk a possible deer; watching closely all the way for hares, or birds or anything eatable. The long, hot hours passed without bringing him luck. On he trudged fiercely, morosely till he saw the party pitching their tent; then he gave up and plodded slowly toward them. They rushed to meet him.

"Nothing!" he cried, showing his empty hands. "We learn now this country is tricky."

"Hadn't we better turn back!" faltered Okak.

"Too late! It's too late for that! We're dead sure there is no game behind us at least three days' journey—on ahead we may find something."

Taptuna was very blue; his low spirits frightened Okak and made Kak feel sober. Guninana, bustling about, talked to cheer them all:

"Nonsense! What's the good of being so glum only because you haven't killed a caribou the last few days? See here, Noashak and I have dug a grand bag of masu roots; we will have them boiled in no time and can go to bed with full tummies."

But in spite of her efforts nobody looked happy. Masu is a sort of wild parsnip, at its best hardly a

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nice supper, and not very sustaining for hungry hunters.

Okak was thoroughly scared by the situation, much too scared to sleep. He felt he was to blame for having suggested caching their extra food; so he stole out while the others rested and succeeded in snaring two squirrels. You would never believe how small a squirrel is when it has been skinned! And there were five of them, besides the dogs, to breakfast off these two little fellows. Guninana got scarcely any, as she gave most of her share to Noashak. They were hungry all day and had to dine on three ptarmigans, small grouse, shot by Kak; for Taptuna was still bent on fetching home something worth while.

"Mark my words," said Okak cheerlessly, "we are going to have to live all summer on birds and squirrels and masu roots."

"Don't be such a grouch," Kak replied shortly. "I saw a hare to-day."

"Why didn't you get him, son? Seeing isn't eating!"

Kak looked rather foolish. "Because," he explained, "while I was following the hare I saw a caribou run over the ridge, and I thought he'd be grand to have, so I went for him. But he had seen me and he ran and ran, and I followed till I was

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afraid I might lose you all; so then I thought I'd come back after the hare—but he had skipped away.”

“Tut, tut! You ought to have stuck to the hare, lad, and made sure of him when we're so short. A pot of boiled hare to-night would have been first rate.”

“Yes, wouldn't it?”

“Elegant!”

Kak licked his lips and exchanged glances with his mother. Guninana's look said: “All the same, your father is hunting caribou when he might be killing hares, he is wiser than his own words. I think you were quite right.” And that made the boy feel happy again.

They grew hungrier every day, and it grew hotter every day, and the flies seemed to bite worse and worse. Kak was so busy hunting now he could not look after Sapsuk, so the poor dog's eyes and feet were almost as bad as Pikalu's. Strange to say Noashak behaved better than anybody expected. She ate very little over her share, sometimes Guninana or Taptuna spared her an extra bite, but on the whole she fared like the rest and was no more cantankerous than usual. It was Noashak, too, who raised the first cry of “Woods!” Since they could see no break beyond the trees this was an alarm in-

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stead of their journey's welcome end. The forest spreads thickly east of Dismal Lake. They must take their bearings afresh, turn and follow the straggling spruce till the first great disk of shining water lay on their left. At sight of it hope shot up like a rocket. One more night's trek would bring them to the ford, where Omialik and his magic gun promised food!

That day they pitched their camp in a driving rain, built a big bonfire in front of the tent, and dined off part of a sleeping rug. The old caribou skin when boiled made a shockingly poor dinner but better than nothing. No one wanted to repeat it for breakfast though; they preferred to go without on the chance of finding something nicer. This was the first time they had really gone empty. The three bowmen took it stoically and separated for better hunting; while Guninana with a tearful, hungry little girl and the famished dogs, tried to make a straight course over the hills. The far shore running out between the two lobes of the lake gave them direction.

Now they had come so near Kak was all on fire to be the first to meet the Kabluna. He raced through the strip of woods, neglecting to watch for game, crashing over stones and under boughs, risking everything to reach the shore. The white man

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had promised to wait by the ford, and his party were sure to be there—sure! For Taptuna's family had traveled slowly the last two weeks. Half rations do not make either men or animals feel particularly frisky, nor much like walking all day at top speed under a boiling sun.

When the ground began to drop toward the water and the trees thinned Kak redoubled his efforts. Coming out suddenly on to the narrow channel dotted with islands which joins the first and second parts of this triple lake, he saw men up the beach and near the woods a tent, gave one exultant whoop, and made for them. They in turn started, dropped their work, and ran forward.

"Omialik! Omialik!" gasped the breathless youngster.

But he was doomed to disappointment. It was not Omialik himself, only his Eskimos.

"Where are the others? Have you any food?" they asked in one voice.

"Not a bite," Kak panted. "The rest are behind. I haven't eaten since sleeping!"

"We're pretty nearly starved ourselves but we can do better than that for you. Come along, Kid!" Linking arms they escorted their visitor to the tent, where they put before him a large bowl of cloud-berries. These are something like raspberries and

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they grow in Victorialand, but strange to say, Kak had never eaten any, had never thought of tasting them.

"Are they good?" he asked suspiciously.

"Fine! Eat all you want," cried both men, and scooping up fingerfuls stuffed them into their mouths. Kak was far too hungry for further question; he ate the berries and enjoyed them. It was the same with Noashak when she came; but Guninana refused to touch such food. To her it seemed like eating grass out in a field. She had been walking over those berries all her life and had never heard of anybody eating them, and why should she begin now?

The Kabluna's Eskimos explained they had just arrived after a difficult and luckless journey; and their master was hunting while they made camp. They went one in either direction along the shore calling to guide Taptuna and Okak. Presently Okak turned up with some squirrels, and Taptuna with birds; and last of all came Omialik carrying a backload of caribou meat. Then there was a great feast and much rejoicing, and they sat up all night telling their experiences. Of course it did not seem like sitting up all night because the sun was shining the whole time and it continued broad day; but Omialik, who carried a watch and never forgot to

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wind it, said they had been up all night; and as it was nearly noon they had better go to bed and get some sleep.

All being strangers in that locality no one knew exactly where to find the ford. Rumor said it ran from island to island, a ridge of high bottom on which they might cross about waist-deep. After breakfast, a substantial meal eaten at nine o'clock in the evening, the Kabluna decided to look for it himself, while his men brought the rest of the caribou from the woods, and Okak and Taptuna hunted. Kak gained permission to help at the ford. It was about the hottest hour in the ceaseless Arctic day, and the two started out in fine spirits, thinking it would be no end of a lark wading in the cool lake while their friends fought flies and sweated on the chase.

With a loud laugh at their cleverness, Kak splashed into the water. "Whoop! Huroo! This is the life!"

The Kabluna picked a place where the shore eased off gradually, and waded right out above his waist.

"I'm coming with you," yelled Kak.

"No, don't! Stay where you are. It's too deep for you here."

In a few minutes Omialik was up to his neck.

"Be careful—do be careful!" the boy pleaded,

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expecting to see his companion go head under, and knowing it impossible to help.

Kak was in a panic watching the other moving slowly around out there; but after a while he grew more confident and began to search for himself, walking slowly up and down, to and fro, hoping to strike the shallow lead.

The sun had gone behind clouds. Soon it commenced to rain. The joke was on them! Wading in ice-water with a cold shower beating on your head and trickling down your neck is not nearly so much fun as wading when the thermometer on shore registers about a hundred degrees. Kak wished now he had gone with the hunters, for they returned at the first drop of rain, and were lying around, nice and warm and comfy inside the tents, swapping yarns and having a good, cheery time. Of course he could not desert Omialik—that was a base thought—and the white man did not seem to have the least idea of going back on his cold, miserable job.

The Kabluna waded and waded waist-deep, and Kak waded and waded waist-deep; speaking no word of complaint, for that would have meant being instantly sent home.

Once Omialik said: "The man who named this Dismal Lake was certainly inspired."

Kak laughed. "I didn't think so yesterday when

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I found your camp and had my first taste of cloudberries.”

They were standing side by side, the boy up to his armpits in water. “When I have a rifle and a fish-net and learn all kinds of things there are to eat I’ll never be hungry, I expect,” he added thoughtfully.

His friend applauded this: “That’s the idea, youngster! Make up your mind to use the food you find around you, and there will be much less chance of starvation.”

Kak, who was paying more heed to the conversation than to where he went, answered with a frightful gurgle and disappeared from sight. Omialik made a lunge for him, missed, ducked under water, grabbed a shadowy substance, and hauled it to the light and air.

“For goodness’ sake, watch your step, child!” he exclaimed as they shook the lake out of their eyes. “I don’t want you drowned on my hands. Perhaps you’d better keep nearer to shore.”

Kak, crestfallen and scared, made his slow way back to the beach and in doing so came on a sound, level bottom. He turned to face about, walking toward the nearest island, a step at a time, for he was now far from his companion and he knew if his foot slipped into another hole it would be the end of him. On he went, so engrossed in feeling his careful way

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that he had been moving forward a long time before he thought to look up. To his surprise he found himself out in the lake beyond Omialik, and only waist-deep. The boy knew in a twinkling he was on the ford and saw a fine chance to play a joke. Maybe you would not feel like joking if your feet and legs were parked in a cold lake and your head buffeted by driving rain; but the Eskimos love fun above all things. The party had been a bit down on their luck lately, and Kak felt the world owed him several laughs. So he squatted low with his knees apart like a frog, his head and chin just showing on the surface, and cried:

“Omialik! Omialik!”

The Kabluna looked around. “Come back!” he yelled fiercely, shocked to see Kak taking such chances at that distance. He was not really alarmed, for he thought the boy was only showing off.

“I can’t!” Kak answered promptly, now with a wailing note. “I’m stuck. Do please come and help me—help!”

Impossible to turn a deaf ear to that cry! Omialik, who wanted to look for the ford instead of rescuing folks every few minutes, said something impatient under his breath and started toward Kak as quickly as he could go. To his amazement the water

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instead of getting deeper and deeper, grew shallower. "I'm walking right across the place," he muttered. "Drat that boy! I'll just about lose it again." But still he kept on hurrying toward distress, while Kak splashed feebly once and again to show what a bad way he was in. At last Omialik had almost reached the drowning boy and the water continued only around his hips.

He stopped, and said suddenly, "What's the matter with you? You're on the ford!"

Then Kak shot up to his full height, gave a great leap, and seizing his companion's shoulders, cried:

"Fooled you! Fooled you! Sure we're on the ford! I knew it all the time!"

The white man looked rather cross for a minute, but he laughed and said:

"All right. I don't mind being fooled like this any day. I guess you've found the ford; we'll mark the spot and go along and explore."

They both took hold of a long pole Omialik had been carrying and stuck it into the bottom of the lake, driving it down firmly, so that it stood alone with its top out; and then they walked ahead, feeling their way, right across to the island. They marked the place when leaving the water, started from the other side and waded to a second island and so on. It was less difficult once they had found the

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direction, but a cold enough job at best; and on arriving at the far shore they had to turn around and wade back, marking their course with poles so that it would be perfectly simple to find it next day when they all came to cross over with their things.

CHAPTER VIII

Indians

ONCE across Dismal Lake their troubles were ended. The country now abounded in game, and they traveled without haste or anxiety to the headwaters of the Dease River where Eskimo hunting camps were scattered on every hill.

Taptuna and Guninana had known some of these families before and they soon made friends with others, for this was entirely a friendly gathering, everybody having come on the same peaceful mission—to cut spruce and make wooden utensils. There was little need to be afraid of bad Eskimos camped near by, or enemies lurking in the woods, so during a whole month the people kept up a continuous party. The sun shone steadily all the time; and without change from light to darkness, or darkness to light, without clocks, or anything to remind them they ought to stop talking or working or playing, the happy campers did not stop until they got through with whatever occupied them. Kak and his father would go off to cut a tree, and having felled



“GOOD GRACIOUS! DON’T KILL ME!” CRIED A FAMILIAR VOICE.
---(See page 216)

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it, start hewing boards, and chop, and chop till the whole thing stood ready for drying; and then they would discover they were frightfully tired and hungry, and saunter home to eat and sleep. Maybe they had been away sixteen hours, maybe twenty—nobody noticed and nobody cared.

The men alternated this heavy work with hunting, for it was now August and the caribou skins at their short-haired best, and Taptuna knew he must obtain enough to make all their winter clothes. Scraping the skins and sewing them kept Guninana busy; and Noashak amused herself gathering berries, making wreaths of flowers, and trying to work. Once she played with a party of other children, just arrived, for three days and three nights without stopping to sleep—that is for as long as three of our days and nights. The sun was shining, the world ringing with their merry voices, more and more new friends kept coming to stir up excitement, and they were all so supremely happy none of them thought of ending the game. Would you ever want to stop play and rest if the sun did not set you a good example by going to bed first? I doubt it. Noashak was very tired and horribly cross at the end of the party; she wriggled into the tent, dropped on the bed, and slept till her mother thought she was never going to wake up.

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While Noashak was sleeping Kak enjoyed a great treat. His beloved Omialik took him on a little hunting trip, only the two of them together. It was the proudest event of the boy's life. So far he had not realized either of his ambitions: neither grizzly bear nor Indian had crossed his path. However, on the second day of the outing, while Omialik sat with his glasses carefully surveying the surrounding country for a glimpse of game, Kak saw him stiffen to attention and rivet his gaze on one spot.

"What do you see over there?" the white man asked presently, handing the glasses to his young companion.

Kak focused them with eager fingers, conscious of the honor in being thus consulted. "Men," he answered, and his voice shook more than his hands, for he knew what he saw.

"Are they Eskimos?"

"No, none of them—none of them!" Kak was trembling all over with excitement so that he could hardly hold the glasses.

Omialik took another look. "Might be my friend, Selby," he muttered, "but I don't believe it is," adding aloud to Kak: "Well, since we don't know what they are, shall we go and meet them and find out?"

The Eskimo made a slight gurgling noise in his throat which he meant for assent. His inherited in-

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stinct would have been to lie low, allowing these intruders to pass unchallenged; but curiosity worked up to foolhardy courage by his contact with the white man triumphed over discretion. He wanted to meet them, his soul craved to meet them, to observe them closely. The dread name of the enemy had not been mentioned, but Kak knew. He wondered if he ought to warn the Kabluna and thought: "Perhaps if I do Omialik won't go any nearer." Twice the lad's mouth opened to speak, and twice he shut it stubbornly. This was the chance of a lifetime. Danger or no danger he would follow on—at the worst Omialik had his magic gun.

To Kak's surprise his companion did not seem one whit afraid of the three strangers. His approach showed no stealth. When they came to an open place on top of the ridge he stood up, waved his arms, called, and made signs for the other party to wait. Kak watched, hanging back a little, and shaking in those stout sealskin shoes which Guninana had made for him. He felt mightily relieved when the white man took his glasses for another look at closer quarters.

"Indians," Omialik pronounced briefly.

It was true then! Kak's heart pounded. A queer feeling shot all over him, up and down his spine from his hair to his heels.

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"Aren't you—aren't you scared?" he blurted out.

The Kabluna turned, eyed him searchingly, and laughed. "Good gracious, no! But of course if you are—if you feel jumpy, my boy, stay here and I'll come back for you."

The young hunter flushed. "I wouldn't miss it for anything!" he cried, and moved on in front.

They struck across the valley at a wide angle calculated to head off the strangers. Kak led boldly for the first mile; but long before the parties actually met he had discovered an excuse and lagged behind.

The Indians were not a bit what he expected. They all wore white man's clothes, and one of them talked fluently with Omialik. In vain the boy's nervous glances searched them for a feather or a scalp or tomahawk, or any sign of their wild and wicked nature. How he wished he could understand what was being said! While their comrade made speeches the other two strangers sat down on a log. The Eskimo watched them out of the corner of his eye. They were very dark-skinned, these men, and had terribly fierce faces, heartless faces. He noted uneasily that through all the conversation neither the Indian nor Omialik laughed once.

The Kabluna had been lucky with his hunting and was carrying deer ribs; the Indians, it appeared, were not so fortunate. By and by Omialik asked Kak to

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make a fire. Keeping his glance as much as possible on the treacherous foe, the boy set about his job. But when the fellows sitting down saw what he was doing, they offered to help. It is difficult to remain afraid of any one willing to assist you in a small domestic task. By the time they had a fire lit and the deer meat turning on sticks before it everybody's tremors were mostly gone.

"Kak," said Omialik, "the strangers are quite as much interested in you as you are in them. This chap—Jimmie Muskrat is his name—tells me they came away north, much farther north than they generally hunt, with the hope of meeting Eskimos."

"Has he met any? Where has he met them?" asked Kak.

The Kabluna translated. "And now you are going back again, so I suppose you have seen Eskimos?"

Jimmie looked sheepish and hastened to explain: "When we found their tracks, so many of them all about here, we thought: 'Three is a very small party and perhaps, now we know where to find these dangerous people another year, it would be better to return with the news, and tell our story, rather than get into a fight and maybe remain silent forever.'"

Omialik kept his face perfectly grave while repeating this, and Kak with a great effort managed

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to control his; but they both wanted to burst out laughing.

"Who is the story for? Who are you planning to tell?"

"I'm coming to that," Jimmie said. "You have been with this boy's people? You know them—you trust them?"

"Many months," Omialik answered. "I find them friendly." And he winked at Kak, saying: "They are scared to death of your tribe, old man."

The Eskimo simply had to chuckle then, so the Indians saw he was friendly; Jimmie began a long story about how he was in the service of Omialik's friend, Selby, and Mr. Selby had asked him to look out for the white man and help him in every possible way.

Omialik translated this, too.

"Whoops! Help *us*!" cried Kak, laughing uproariously, flinging himself back and giving way to all the pent mirth he had been smothering. It really was ridiculous for Jimmie Muskrat to talk patronizingly of helping the white man at the very moment Omialik was feeding him and his friends. But the Indians did not see the joke. They seemed astonished at Kak's performance, but reassured. They liked it—laughing people do not kill you. After a while Jimmie plucked up courage to go on.

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“And Mr. Selby said if I meet you and you know any Eskimos, will you be a friend and introduce me to them; so that another year, when you are not in these parts, I will be able to bring Mr. Selby among them.”

Now this was a very likely message for one white man to send to another in that remote and unexplored country. Omialik did not doubt for a minute that every word of the story was true. Still, it troubled him. He had learned to love the Eskimos, a simple and good-hearted people living simple and true lives; he not only loved them, but he admired them greatly for their many fine qualities. Having lived also with redskins, he knew their faults. Indians are apt to whine when anything goes wrong; they are always ready to break a bargain; they haggle for more pay; they are afraid to venture out of their own territory, and when on a trip make excuses to get home by worrying about their absent friends—in fact, they have no backbone. The Eskimos show none of these bad traits. You do not need to scold an Eskimo to make him do his work. Quite the other way; never having been accustomed to hard words, even as children, Eskimos will not stand reproof at all, which is awkward if you happen to be dealing with a lazy man; but the Kabluna liked it better than being cross all the time. He felt un-

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happy about introducing Indians to his nice Eskimos for fear they might teach them all their bad tricks, and wanted a minute to think it over.

Omialik sat silent a long time considering, so long that Jimmie commenced to look pretty mad. Indians are terribly touchy about their dignity and take offense at many silly little trifles which we would not mind at all. When the Kabluna noticed the stranger was getting annoyed he began to talk to Kak, making it seem as if they consulted.

"Do you think your father and mother and Okak would be willing to meet these men?" he asked.

"Meet them—where—how?" Kak was flabbergasted by the suggestion.

"In the village—if we lead them there?"

The boy answered instantly: "Okak will shoot at sight."

"Not if I warn him first. Not if they come as guests, surely?"

To talk about receiving Indians as guests amazed the Eskimo; but he understood from Omialik's grave manner that the discussion was serious, that he was being asked to speak for his whole tribe on an important issue, so he frowned deeply and sat quiet thinking, trying to behave as much like the Kabluna as he could.

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"Will they agree to meet them?" Omialik gently pressed his question.

The boy being all mixed up in his mind spoke exactly as he felt: "After they have met them they will agree to meet them but not before. No—that sounds rubbish! I mean these Indians aren't a bit like what we think they are like. They don't act like it, and they don't look like it—but of course they may be it all the time underneath."

"What do you think they are like?" Omialik asked curiously.

"Dangerous, treacherous, bad."

Kak did not have to ponder that answer at all, it tripped off his tongue like a well-learned charm; but he added in justice, as his glance traveled from one dark face to another: "They don't look it."

Meanwhile Jimmie and his companions had time to develop cold feet. Seeing their proposal arouse so much argument made them think twice about it also. They consulted, decided the adventure might prove dangerous even under escort, and agreed to draw off.

"It is only that your friend, Selby, told me to ask you—for us, we would as soon not," Muskrat whined.

But his words, which were intended to excuse him, acted quite the wrong way. - Naturally Omialik

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liked to please his friend, a man does not have so many friends up there in the north.

“Since Selby wants it I agree,” he added. “We will start now, camp in the woods, and to-morrow find a place for you to lie hidden while I arrange the interview.”

The white man had spoken and none dared to contradict. They joined forces, traveling together many hours, during all of which time Kak treated the strangers like comrades. But as soon as they stopped, and the Indians withdrew to make their own camp, they became mysterious and awful again in his imagination. He watched them moving about through the glade; saw them pitch their tepee; saw the long shadows cast by the midnight sun streaming over it; saw the three men enter. Then he crept inside Omialik's silk tent, but he did not feel like sleeping. Impossible to forget that other camp standing a bare hundred paces away harboring the deadly enemy! Those stories of how his people had all been killed while they slept tormented the boy's memory. His nerves tingled with apprehension—he would not stoop to call the fever fear—but all the same it drove him to suggesting that he and Omialik might take turns on guard.

The Kabluna thought this a roaring joke. “First rate!” he laughed. “You will be watching here, old

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fellow, and the redskins will be watching in their quarters, for they are about as scared as they find comfortable, and while you are all watching I can feel perfectly safe, and will have a thoroughly sound sleep."

Of course this kind of talk made Kak seem rather absurd, but it did not entirely quiet his pulse. He knew somebody ought to watch; if Omialik would not take turns he must just manage to stay on guard all alone. He played foxy and pretended to go to bed, then lay awake staring at the crack of light along the tent flap till his companion slept. The regular breathing of a person asleep is an eerie sound even in broad day; rising and falling through the twilight under their taffy-colored cone, it roused all Kak's alarm. He drew himself up to a sitting position, grasped his knife in one hand, laid his bow ready by his side, and steeled his nerves to combat.

If it had been dark the boy would have stayed awake all night. But sitting up in a gloomy tent with daylight filtering underneath, making outside seem so much safer than inside, is poor meat for romance. There was no sound anywhere. Spruce forest straggled for miles in endless quiet. No wind stirred the heavy boughs; no rain pattered through on to the carpeted ground. Once a rabbit scuttled across, sending shivers up and down the watcher's

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spine, but the ruffling sound died away and nothing happened. Gradually Eskimo fears relaxed; Kak's mind shed its hereditary burden; he began to wonder at himself for going against Omialik's advice.

"The Kabluna knows lots more about these things than I do," the boy murmured. He leaned over, gazing at his companion's face; he considered him wistfully.

Omialik looked huge lying there in the tiny tent. He was certainly powerful. He could run fifty miles beside the dog sleigh without resting, this man; he could kill the fiercest animals by his strong magic—Kak had seen him do it, and had been told the gun would quite as easily kill people. He was a Kabluna. He lived with Eskimos and was one of them, yet he talked to Indians like a blood brother. He was a stranger to fear—and everybody loved and served him. "What does it?" the boy wondered. "Gee! I wish I could grow up a strong, wonderful fellow like him."

Kak pondered Omialik's magic as he watched him sleeping helpless on the ground. His hand stole over and gently touched the sleeper's head—a big head with its bushy mass of hair. "Omialik is so kind his heart must be big also," the lad mused, never guessing how his thought impinged on the

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secret of the other's power, for together great hearts and great brains master their world.

In the dim interior forms began to dance and blur. Kak's own head nodded. He jerked upright and grasped his knife; but presently his muscles slacked. He nodded again. Then the Kabluna turned on one side and the sound of his breathing ceased. All was silent. Kak's head bobbed right down, his chin rested on his chest and his shoulders sagged against the tent.

Omialik found him that way next morning, his knife grasped ready for their mutual defense. And as the man of the big heart gazed at the heroic youngster he decided it would not be too much trouble, some day, to take such a faithful follower as far as Herschel Island. He kept the plan a secret, though. Parking Indians and carrying the news home promised sufficient excitement for the present.

Noashak waked from her long sleep demanding food, so Guninana was busy over the cooking pot when the hunters returned.

"You will stay and eat?" she begged the white man; but all the time she was putting choice pieces into her guest's plate, both eyes and mind were on her son.

It is difficult for a boy to hoodwink his mother. Guninana knew at once something was in the wind.

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"What can they have been up to?" she asked herself; but kept still and waited, sure it would not be long before the matter leaked out.

Kak was simply bursting to tell. Never in his life had he experienced such thrills as the waking to that day of strange companionship and stealthy travel, culminating in the wild unreality of hiding Indians a couple of miles from their village. Every soul he had met since entering the camp seemed to look at him with probing eyes. "Suppose they knew!" thought the boy, and his heart beat faster. The fact of having seen their hereditary foe, of having spoken to Indians at all was a great distinction, another feather to stick in his cap along with the slain ugrug and his house building. And on top of this, knowing three of the terrible redskins were lying hidden among the trees so near his own home was just too much to bear quietly.

"I've got a secret," he whispered to Guninana.

"I see you have."

"Oh, mother! Take that back. I don't show it—I mustn't show it!" Kak looked very stern. Guninana eyed him curiously. "I'm dying to tell you," he explained, "but it is Omialik's secret."

"Then keep it, son. Prove you can be trusted."

"All very well talking so ordinary—but you don't

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know what a buster of a secret this is!" the boy replied.

It was a buster. When Omialik called a family council and put the thing before them Guninana screamed:

"Indians! Have Indians here in camp—in our tents! No. No indeed! Don't you think I value my children's lives? Noashak, where are you? Keep close to the village to-day, child, there is danger in the woods. Kak——"

"You needn't fuss about me," her son answered. "I know that danger. I know where it is—the exact spot. I've seen the danger. I had breakfast with it this morning!" This was altogether too fine a chance, Kak could not resist bragging. "Fact is," he continued swaggering with his hands on his hips, "it's not nearly so dangerous a danger as you all think."

Guninana threw up her hands.

"You tell me Indians aren't dangerous! That you have eaten with Indians! Taptuna, the boy is crazy. We will consult the shaman—he must have been in the sun."

But Taptuna took his son's magnificence quite calmly. "No, he is only a little excited—elated. Breakfasting with danger would make any boy overproud. . . . So many strange things are happening

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now it is even possible Indians might come among us for other reasons than to kill. . . . Are they your friends?" he asked abruptly, turning to Omialik.

"They come from my friends."

"What do they want?"

"To know you; to trade with you."

"But we have never had anything to do with Indians!" Guninana broke in. Entertaining Indians was the limit, far, far worse than being expected to eat cloudberry. Before this Kabluna left he would have turned their world upside down.

"That is no reason why we need not meet them now," Taptuna mildly suggested.

His family gazed at him in silent horror, unable to believe he actually approved of taking such tremendous risks. Noashak had burrowed under her mother's arm for protection. All she understood of the talk was that Indians lurked in the woods. Omialik sat quiet. Kak strutted in the background. Then Okak rose to his feet. He had been struck dumb, now he found speech. With blanched countenance and knocking knees he faced them, but his voice rang out:

"Listen, friends. We have had no good from these red men; our fathers had no good from their fathers. Always when we come in contact, our tribes and theirs, it is to destroy. We have killed

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their kin and they have killed our kin; and now doubtless these strangers are plotting to kill again. They cannot come with any but evil and treacherous intentions, for their hearts are treacherous. They flatter us by smiles and with soft sentences while knives are hidden in their clothing. They will trade among us, you say? Yes, they will betray us, and kill the whole tribe out of hand when the first chance offers. I tell you—all Indians are bad Indians.”

Okak's terror winged his words. He felt himself the savior of his people, delivering a solemn warning in a desperate crisis; and under the influence of this noble emotion he made a very fine speech. The harangue lasted about ten minutes and many families from other tents gathered around to hear what was going on. They listened amazed; then had to be taken into confidence. As soon as the village caught the drift of this news hubbub broke loose. Some argued for the visit, some against it, and some both ways at once. All went mad with excitement. The only unchanging voices were Taptuna's dignified support and Kak's persistent bragging.

When the Eskimos heard Kak had already talked with Indians, camped with them, journeyed with them, he became a center of interest. They pressed on him a hundred questions and he expanded marvelously, giving them all they wanted, letting his imag-

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ination run riot. But soon, in spite of gorgeous tales and towering adventure, the dullest of them reasoned, "If a mere lad does such things the red men cannot be so frightful after all."

"Frightful! Huh, no!" cried the boy. "They're too cowardly to be frightful! Why, these three big fellows were afraid of me! They started north to meet Eskimos and were scared to enter our camp after seeing me."

Inherited fear could not stand up under such statements. Public opinion grew bolder. It was finally voted the Indians might come to the village if they agreed to leave their weapons behind.

Taptuna announced the decision formally, standing where Okak had stood. The Kabluna followed him with a short speech expressing his satisfaction. And then he and his Eskimos and Kak set off to escort the strangers from their hiding-place.

You would imagine, after making the original suggestion himself, and having traveled so far for this very purpose, Jimmie Muskrat and his friends would have been sitting with their tongues hanging out waiting for the summons. But not a bit of it. While the villagers were debating the three Indians had allowed their fancy to water their fears and a huge crop was grown. Half afraid the evening before and ready to draw out, they were now in a crazy

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panic, determined nothing on earth could make them take a step toward the Eskimo camp. So they jumped as one man on the only excuse, that condition about leaving their weapons behind.

"Why should we leave our weapons?" Jimmie demanded angrily. "It is clear these people mean to get us unarmed among them and then to kill us all! But I am too smart for their tricks. We are decided. We will have no more to do with this meeting."

Omialik began to be very sorry he had mixed up in the affair, even to oblige his friend, Selby. He reasoned with the Indians. But they remained all very positive and very fierce; talking a lot in loud, angry voices.

The white man talked also. He explained to Kak and his followers how Jimmie wanted to back out, and that he feared if the strangers did not turn up the village would consider it a sign of treachery, would take instant fright, and all rush away north to safety, leaving behind their spruce boards and half-made sleds; and that Omialik would be blamed for having brought a great loss and catastrophe on them.

His own Eskimos agreed this was exactly what would happen, but they did not see how the situation could be saved. They were helpless.

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"Dogs that won't eat have to be made to eat," Kak heard the Kabluna mutter. And while he was still wondering what those strange words meant he saw an awesome change.

Omialik's eyes grew gray and very cold. He spoke shortly in a hard voice. He bade his Eskimos and Kak take each an Indian by the arm and lead him forward. And when the strangers started to resist, he raised his gun. All knew the import of that action. It was no bluff. The magic gun was good for killing animals—and men, red men who would not do what Omialik commanded. Kak shivered. He saw Jimmie Muskrat quail before his master, saw him turn meekly and lead off, his companions following. And he knew that his friend of the big heart was one to be obeyed.

Thus, two and two, with the Kabluna bringing up the rear, they marched their frightened guests into the half-frightened village. But as soon as the Eskimos saw the strangers they recovered spirit. It was as Kak had tried to say: They would not consent to meet the Indians till they had met them; then seeing their dreaded enemies in white man's clothes, quite ordinary and unlike their expectation, they lost every trace of fear and behaved in a very friendly manner.

The village gave a splendid supper of roasted cari-

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bou heads of which Indians and Eskimos alike are very fond, and of masu, blood soup, and other delicacies which the visitors had never tasted; and then, everybody having been up for hours and hours, invited them into their tents to sleep. This the Indians flatly refused. They were afraid to separate and trust themselves among the different families, so they told a whopper, and claimed it was their custom to sleep on the ground by the fire. The hosts were much too polite to contradict, though they thought this very odd indeed. Kak knew it was a lie, still he said nothing. The boy saw that Omialik and his Eskimos were staying with the red men and wanted to stay also. But keeping guard most of the previous night and playing hero most of the day had worn him out. At a word from Guninana he gave up, went to his bed, dropped on it, and slept like a log.

Next morning Jimmie invited the Eskimos to go down to the Indian camp where they had smoked caribou meat and marrow-bones. Only a few of the men, headed by Taptuna with his wife and a friend of hers, ventured to accept; but those who did go were very glad, for the Indians treated them royally and made a feast in one of their great lodges. After the feast, an old slant-eye who happened to be among the company dressed up in his ancient cos-

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tume to show off. Everybody sat about conversing, Muskrat always taking the lead while Omialik translated. Finally the Indians bestowed some simple presents on their guests, and the party turned homeward.

The whole village could talk of nothing else but these visits. They all felt so glad to know the Indians were not so wicked as they had believed. Men and women went about with light hearts, for one of the worst dangers of their southern trips to get wood had now been removed. They need no longer tremble at the thought of being massacred in their beds. Everybody talked Indian with enthusiasm—everybody but Okak. He never varied one whit from the stand he had taken in his fine speech: The redskins were enemies—bad men; and nothing good could come of dealing with them.

Taptuna used to laugh at his friend for this, poking fun at such timidity. But quite suddenly, one day, he stopped laughing and poking fun. After that when Okak began to talk about “bad Indians” the chief scout sat by moodily making no remark, or exchanging glances with his wife and son.

The change hinged on a serious discovery. Omialik had gone down during the summer to see his friend, Selby, who was camped below them on Great Bear Lake, and returned with the disquieting news



AN OLD SLANT-EYE DRESSED UP IN HIS ANCIENT COSTUME TO SHOW OFF.

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that Mr. Selby, although he knew Jimmie Muskrat and his two companions, had never told the Indian to look out for white men, nor to ask to be introduced to Eskimos. Why, then, had Jimmie schemed to get into this settlement? Why had he taken the northerners to his tribe? Nobody knew; nobody could tell. The Kabluna thought it might only be for the glory of having done something unusual. But Guninana shook her wise head. All her fear of the treacherous enemy flowed back doubled on discovering this trick.

"From lying to murder is but a step," she moaned. "He who deceives in one thing is faithless in all."

The family discussed the matter gravely in the privacy of their tent. They argued it at length with Omialik; they deplored it alone. But all agreed it was best not to tell Okak nor to alarm the village.

"We will be moving away from here so soon," Taptuna said. "Let us go quietly."

"And let's keep a sharp lookout before we go!" Kak added.

CHAPTER IX

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"COME here! Come here, Noashak! It is better that you stay here."

Guninana stood at the tent door. Her face, as always now, wore a shadow of anxiety. She called, but Noashak would not mind.

The child ran a little way to where her brother sat and creeping up behind threw herself on him, clapping both her hands over his eyes so that he could not see.

"Get off!"

Kak was busy making arrows. He had determined to have an extra good supply for their northern trip across the prairie. "So I can shoot at every bird and beast I see," the boy proclaimed, adding in his heart, "and maybe kill a grizzly bear." He sat cross-legged on a mossy stone, and at the moment his sister jumped on his back he was measuring an arrow from his chin to his middle finger tip. Noashak's sudden impact drove the sharp end into his flesh. Kak turned on her angrily.

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"Why can't you keep off me, kid! How is a fellow ever going to get ready for a journey with you bothering 'round?"

"I want you to come and play."

"Play! Can't you see I'm busy—this is important work!"

"But I want to play," insisted the child.

Kak was silent.

"Brother, please be nice and play," the little girl coaxed, looking at him through her lashes, dropping her voice to a small murmur.

She stood before him, winsome and pathetic, with her long hair hanging in two braids over her shoulders and her hands clasped behind her back. But the boy was gazing ruefully at his arrow. Her blow had broken it.

"Get out," he answered. "Can't I ever have any peace? Leave me alone!"

Noashak, who happened to be in one of her rare good moods and expected everybody else to be good too, looked for a second as if she were going to cry; then she turned swiftly.

"I will play with the hares and marmots," she said, "for I have no brother and the children are all away."

With that she began to run. Her little brown legs twinkled over the ground toward the thickest

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woods where spruce held out protecting arms. Her clothes were of dappled fawnskin and once among the lichened rocks and checkered shadows she was as completely hidden as a fawn.

Kak replaced the broken part and trained his eye down the spliced shaft. His conscience troubled him. "You might have played a game with your little sister," something seemed to say; and reason answered: "But how is a chap ever to get a day's work done?" He rubbed his sore chin gingerly and measured the arrow again. Quite right. Yet he did not hold it up for his mother's approval as was his wont. Guninana had seen that roughness; had looked at him reproachfully. The boy felt unhappy and ashamed. He got up and walked away to the working place, where all the wood he and his father had hewed stood drying. Taptuna was there putting the finishing touches to his new sled. Mere sight of that sleigh was enough to raise anybody's spirits.

"A beaut'!" Kak cried. How Sapsuk and Pik-alu will make it flash along."

The owner glanced up pleased and satisfied. "Yes. It's a fine sleigh, and I'm glad it's done. Now just as soon as the snow comes we can be off."

No need to explain why he wanted to get away quickly. The shadow of anxiety on Guninana's face was reflected in her husband's. "Unfortunately

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the snow is late this year; still, in a week or two we can count on the first flurry. . . . Got to be in time for the trading at Cape Bexley," he added more cheerily.

Kak brightened. "Golly! I've got some fine pieces for Kommana. Look here!" He slapped a proprietary hand on one broad board cut from the heart of the largest tree they had found. "The snow shovel I promised him. That dog will be mine certainly if they show up at the Cape."

"Yours—eh? Who helped cut the tree; and who is going to feed the dog?"

"Now, dad! We'll go halves on him, of course, in working and feeding—but he is to be mine, if we get him. It's a promise—isn't it a promise? Say it's a promise," Kak teased.

Taptuna laughed. "Oh, all right. I promise—if we get him. Lend a hand here with this lacing, will you."

He gave the end of the long thong to Kak; and the boy, wreathed in smiles, for he had just been granted one of his most cherished dreams, pitched into work whole-heartedly. So the hours slipped by in pleasant comradeship and Kak never once thought of that buncy figure he had watched running off to play with the hares and marmots.

It was late in the season now. Their continuous

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Arctic day had passed. The sun sank at midnight below the horizon leaving it dark for three or four hours. About sundown Guninana came to the working place, her face graver than before.

"Have you seen Noashak?" she called from a distance; and Taptuna without looking up called:

"No. She has not been here!"

"Then she is lost."

"How's that!" Noashak's father stopped work, straightened his long back and gazed in astonishment at the speaker.

Guninana had come close. She dropped on a stump wearily, looking at her husband with troubled eyes, but addressing her son: "The child has not been home since she ran to you, Kak. What did she want then? What did she say?"

Both turned for the reply and the lad's glance fell before his father's.

"She went to play with the hares and marmots," he muttered, kicking at a root.

"Into the woods—and you did not prevent her! Oh, son!"

"Well, how was I to know——" Kak began impatiently, and stopped. For he saw something in his parents' faces that caught at his own heart.

"Foxes, I never thought of it! I'll go and hunt

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for her—I'll call. Don't you worry, mother. I know all the places she plays in."

"I have hunted. I have called," Guninana answered miserably. Then roused herself to cry after the boy. "Don't go too far. It's growing dark; and there is no sense in your being lost also."

Taptuna started at once in another direction, and between them they beat the near woods calling "Noashak!" and calling to each other; keeping in touch. Then, as the twilight deepened, his father ordered Kak home. They both came in gloomy and fatigued and sat down without a word. Okak had finished his supper and brought sticks to replenish the fire. He was silent, observing. Taptuna accepted a horn of soup, but Kak refused. Shame and self-reproach were eating at his heart. He had hunted for Noashak in a fever of remorse, rushing up and down the woods calling her name aloud; promising through set teeth all he would do for her and be to her if she only came back alive. Now he threw himself supperless by the fire and fell asleep.

"Where is the little one?" Okak asked presently. "I have not seen her with the other children to-day."

There was a noticeable pause; then Guninana answered, trying to make her voice sound ordinary. "She went to play and has not come back yet."

"But the others are back long ago!"

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"She went into the woods."

Taptuna's voice sounded rough for his proud soul was full of alarm which he would have liked to keep from Okak.

"Ah—into the woods—and she has not returned."

Each slow word was a knife twisted in their hearts. Dead silence followed. It is not necessary to talk when all know what the others are thinking. At last Okak broke out violently:

"This is exactly what I expected! We had better rouse the village, neighbor, and go in pursuit."

His use of that final strange word stabbed his belief home.

"Nonsense!" protested Taptuna, but the familiar exclamation lacked force. It seemed to drop away into darkness. Okak's voice continued harshly:

"Ah, yes! You have been saying 'Nonsense, nonsense' to me all summer. But now this is not such 'nonsense' if the Indians have taken Noashak. And why should we suppose they haven't got her? Has any child ever strayed from the camp before? Not one! Certainly they have enough intelligence to return if they are not prevented. And what else could prevent her—who else but your precious red traders! It is fortunate if they have only carried her away, and have not already taken her teeth for their children's toys and her hair as a decoration."

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"Don't!" Guninana cried shuddering.

Though his speech was cruel she knew Okak as a faithful friend. He had already put on his stoutest pair of boots and was selecting his best arrows with trembling hands.

"Where is Omialik?" he asked.

"Hunting."

"It is as well for him that he is hunting!"

This threat sounded so sinister the others were quite taken aback. They had not expected blood and vengeance of the timid Okak.

Seeing Taptuna hesitated the little man took another tone, urging: "Come, neighbor, there is no time to lose. A volunteer party must start for the Indian encampment at once."

When one person makes up his mind about anything so very positively, he is apt to carry conviction to others. Taptuna did not know what to think. Okak's turning into a man of action was an uncanny business in itself. It made him feel as you would feel if a statue on the street corner suddenly came to life and commenced issuing orders. Circumstances seemed to prove his fears and hatred just. They had held the thought of Indians from the first, though unconfessed; and nothing came to mind to overthrow their neighbor's reasoning. Besides, both

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realized that neither Okak nor the village knew the worst—the fact of Jimmie Muskrat's trickery.

"Perhaps—perhaps! It will be better to go down and see—and be sure," Taptuna muttered.

"Anything is better than nothing. Do *something*!" the mother moaned.

At that her tall, competent husband turned and meekly followed his fussy companion across the open ground to the mottled tents looking so much like rocks under the pale radiance of the autumn moon.

Kak awakened to the menace of an empty village, deserted work, his mother's grief, and the frightened faces of the women who had come to sympathize. Okak's accusations had convinced them. They told the boy without a shadow of doubt that Noashak had been carried off by Indians and the men were gone after her. All this tragedy springing out of his one moment's ill nature was more than Kak could stand. It seemed very unfair. Nobody spoke a word of blame, but he felt they all knew it was his fault, and unable to meet their looks he stole away and hid amid the underbrush till the search party should return.

When he heard them coming he crept out hopefully. But the worst news was already leaping from lip to lip by the time he got home. They had found the camp site but no campers. The remains of the

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lodges were freshly deserted, and it was all too evident the Indians had run away with their prize. Taptuna, nearly crazy, had insisted, against his people's advice, on immediate pursuit. He would have started alone had not the Kabluna's two Eskimos volunteered to go. The three were following hot on the redskins' trail.

Kak revisited the underbrush and gave himself up to despair. He had felt remorseful last night; now his heart sank into his very boots. Omialik being away added the last drop of bitterness to the cup. This distress was purely unselfish. Much as the boy longed for advice and comfort, he really wanted his friend to come back and clear his own good name. Women in the village were already telling how the white man had been party to the whole plot; asking, "Aren't his Eskimos glad for an excuse to escape?" They said Omialik would never come again, would never dare to show his face. This hurt Kak as nothing else could have done. It was difficult to keep doubt out of his valiant little soul when doubt seethed all around him. Of course he did not believe their lies, but the sting and strain of loyalty which stands against the mob, and the soreness which endurance leaves in the human heart are fierce emotions for a child. Kak writhed in double torture; then gradually his mood shifted from crushed humil-

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iation to stern resolve. Since it was his fault Noashak had fallen into the Indians' hands, it was plainly his duty to rescue her; and it was his privilege to defend Omialik—to warn him.

Lying on his back, staring up into the blue sky, Kak thought it all out carefully. He would go after his sister. No need to waste time scouting around by the deserted camp, he could strike boldly across country till he reached the eastern end of Great Bear Lake, and once there he would find Mr. Selby. If Mr. Selby proved friendly and asked the Indians living about him to help, then Kak would be able to send a warning to Omialik, for his friend must know his plans.

Fired with ambition the boy crept back to their tent, made up a small package of dried meat, took his bow and arrows—all his new ones that he had been so eagerly laying aside for use on the homeward journey—and stole away.

Guninana sat among the neighbors in the largest tent, where a shaman in a sort of trance, with wild contortions and weird words, sought Noashak. Kak kept out of it. He did not want to be stopped and questioned. "Mother will understand when she sees I have taken these arrows," he thought, as he ran on silent feet down the nearest path. Kak too looked like a deer in his deerskin clothing. The trees held

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out welcoming arms, and the rocks were mottled with grays and browns. In a few minutes the wilderness swallowed him, leaving no trace.

He struck boldly south. The forest consisted mostly of slender spruce in scattered formation, so at first he made good progress. But when he had gone perhaps six hours' travel the woods grew denser; thick enough to try both his strength and patience. He was thinking about making camp, sitting down for a rest and a bite of food anyway, when a rustle in the branches set his pulses throbbing. The forest lay still but not silent; a light wind from the north, sighing continuously, swayed the tapering tree tops; but this noise he heard was different from any wind noises—a persistent rustling through the alders. It was sunset and darkening here in the woods, and poor Kak, who had been like a lion a moment before, felt all the courage oozing out of him. He fell on one knee behind a log. The sound came nearer, grew unmistakable. Some large body moved through the copse. The young hunter laid an arrow across his bow and waited with every muscle taut. On it came, near—so near he began to tremble for his safety. What if a grizzly bear loomed suddenly out of the dusk above him! The boy knelt trembling, with distended eyes riveted on that spot where the stealthy noise seemed to approach.

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"Whatever it is, it's coming so close I can't miss," he thought, and bent the bow. Swiftly the bushes parted, letting a dark mass tower over him. It stood with its back to the waning light and might easily have been an animal by its shaggy outline; but Kak saw. His muscles relaxed in sickening reaction as the human form sprang at him over the log and seized his arm.

"Good gracious! Don't kill me!" cried a familiar voice.

"Omialik!"

Two sorts of relief rang in that cry. The Kabluna was on his way back—then they had all told lies, lies, lies! The boy's sorrowing heart rushed out to his friend, whom he had so nearly shot; he threw himself into the white man's arms and cried like a baby.

"Why, Kak! Why, Kak! Were you lost? Were you scared?"

Omialik repeated over and over as he patted the sobbing youngster: "Brace up. It's all right now. We're not many hours from home. Come—come! Brace up."

"It isn't me," cried the boy. "It's Noashak. She's been stolen by Indians!"

"What nonsense!"

"That's what dad said, but she's gone just the

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same. The men went down to the Indians' camp to hunt for her; but the Indians are gone. And you were gone too! The women are telling that you were in league with Muskrat."

"Great Jehoshaphat!"

This was startling news—bad news—bad enough to make the white man want to hear it quite correctly.

"They've been to the camp, you say, and found the Indians gone?"

"Yes, and father is following with your Eskimos: the rest of the search party came home. . . . It is all my fault Noashak's lost. She ran away into the woods because I was cross with her; so I thought I'd better try and bring her back. And I was going to the lake to leave a message with your Selby about how mad the village is, so—so that you wouldn't go there without your gun."

"You intended to warn me? That was kind."

Omialik's eyes grew soft. One glance at his face was sufficient reward for Kak. Look and words together acted like balm on the boy's bruised self-esteem. As he sat by his friend, eating dried meat and telling him every detail of their scare, his spirits rose. It seemed possible Noashak had never been near those deserted lodges—that they might all have

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been wrong. And he was prepared to accept the white man's judgment when it came.

"I don't believe Muskrat had anything to do with this business. It would be best, my lad, for you and me to return to the village and set matters right there. If your father is not back—if they have no news—we can start systematic search instead of running off on a wild goose chase. Maybe the child is only lost. What made you so sure she was stolen?"

Kak thought hard. "The women told me so," he answered. "And Okak told them so. He was positive."

Oomialik smiled. "Okak was always crazy-frightened of Indians."

"But what he said is true. Noashak would certainly come home from her play unless something was keeping her. The kids never go far."

"Well, something else might have prevented her. Suppose she had fallen, or——"

"Don't!" cried her brother in the same tone Guninana had used. "I'd rather it was Indians than animals!"

The boy found himself suddenly, vividly, plunged back into that terrifying moment before Oomialik appeared, when his courage oozed out of him, his hair stirred on his head, and cold sweat started from

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every pore. He tried to imagine his little sister so amazed, surrounded, trapped by some wild beast of the woods—but it was too awful.

“Come on!” he cried, springing to his feet. “We’ve got to get ahead!”

They had been talking a long time and it was now dark with a cloudy sky. The white man’s instinct was to camp and wait for daylight. But Kak urged him so to “Come along,” to “Try,” that he gave in against his better judgment, and they began scrambling through the thick brush. It was slow, heavy travel and after an hour’s effort, Omialik stopped.

“No use, Kak, we are only losing our way and getting all mixed up. I haven’t any idea which way we are heading. This seems a likely spot, so far as one can feel, and I hear water. Let us camp and wait for morning.”

Kak was about ready to drop from fatigue and silently agreed. They built a little fire for the night was cold, and ate some more dried meat, drinking great refreshing draughts from the spring which Omialik’s quick ear had not failed to note.

“What is that strange smell?” asked the boy, sniffing the keen, autumn wind.

“Caribou, or I’m mistaken. My, but it’s strong! We must be close to an enormous herd—the first

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caribou I have struck in three days, and it's so pitch-black I can't see my hand before my face! What rotten luck!"

"Well, I'm glad it is dark! I'm too tired for hunting," Kak answered, and throwing himself on a bed of moss, immediately slept.

The young hunter awakened in the early morning of a quiet lowering day. Caribou scent hung heavy in the still air. He noticed a strange vibration through the ground, heard the thud and rustle of trotting feet; sat up and shook his companion.

Omialik rolled over sleepily, opened one eye, grew conscious also of that odd trembling in the ground, opened the other eye, and lay staring into the clouds.

"Whatever is it? Do you feel—do you hear?" asked Kak in excited whispers. "Yes, and I smell it too!"

The Kabluna rose on one elbow. "Must be caribou traveling," he said. "A large band—an immense band! . . . Listen to the ripple of their feet. . . . Wonderful! Let's get out of here to some place where we can see."

He scrambled up and pushed through the copse, Kak following. It might have been an eighth of a mile to where the trees thinned. There an unbelievable sight met their eyes. Caribou were marching past in solid columns, two, three, or more abreast.



THE WHOLE PLACE SEEMED TO BE A MOVING RIVER OF DEER.

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These columns were only a few yards apart and extended as far as eye could see into the sparse woods. The whole place seemed to be a moving river of deer.

"I wonder how long it's been going on," the white man exclaimed. "My word, I'm glad we awakened before they all passed! I wouldn't have missed this sight for anything!"

They stood there a long time waiting, expecting the herd to peter out, its spectacle coming to a sudden stop like a battalion marching by. But the solid columns continued to pour on—the river flowed and flowed.

"Marvelous!" sighed Omialik.

"Perhaps we can get along through the woods," Kak suggested; for the fascination of the marching host paled a little when he recollected his sister. The white man could not bear to tear himself away. This was the grandest exhibition of the riches of the north he had ever seen. He wanted to look and look, convincing himself of its reality, so that when he returned to his own country and people talked about "those cold waste regions," and "the barren Arctic," he could remember this and say: "You are all wrong. Hundreds of thousands of animals roam over that so-called desert; birds and butterflies and insects, millions of insects, infest it; and caribou travel there by regiments." Noashak's peril left

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him no choice but to turn his back on the deer. They tramped through the copse where they had slept. In its thickest part the sound of running feet died down a little, then it swelled again, grew sharper, more distinct.

"Foxes!" cried Kak. "I believe we're coming on another lot over here!"

It was so, their copse proved to be an arm of the forest thrusting itself thickly down along either side of a small stream. And they broke out of it suddenly, opposite their first stand, to find more solid columns of migrating deer moving steadily past. These animals walked as close one after the other as possible, while row beyond row lined all the visible area.

"Aren't you hungry?" Omialik said. "Shall I kill some fresh meat for breakfast?"

"First rate!" Kak answered. Then glancing at the closely packed animals, "But it seems a kind of shame!"

"Good for you! That is the right sporting spirit, my boy; stalk your game, don't have it driven. However, necessity is master here—and I don't believe one will be missed. What a chance this to kill a whole winter's food supply! If only my men and your dad were along to help us build caches. It would be waste to slaughter the poor things and

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leave them for wolves." Omialik stood watching, then he glanced at his companion. "Suppose you do the shooting this time and save ammunition."

Excitement fluttered up the boy's nerves; he only hoped he did not show it as he anxiously selected one of the new arrows and bent his bow. Kak had never killed a deer, and there was little glory, he knew, in killing at such easy range; yet he got a thrill when the large buck he had picked staggered and fell among the herd. Omialik's praise was sweet.

They built a fire and feasted on roast ribs, making a quick meal of it, for Noashak's little figure seemed always to be flitting before Kak's eyes.

As the caribou were now moving against a shifted wind, almost directly away from the village, the man and boy were able to walk between two columns when chance offered breaking through one line into the space which divided it from the next, walking there awhile, and at the first opportunity repeating the maneuver; always keeping to the right and slowly working out of the herd. After they had left behind the last straggling groups, a couple of hours' fast travel brought them home.

By late afternoon, as they neared the village, the brother began to worry. "We won't have much daylight for searching," he grumbled, "and I know how

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it will be, everybody crowding around gabbing, trying to get in a word with you or at you—delaying us no end.”

The white man was endeavoring to cheer him by promises of a speedy departure; when who should come running to meet them but Noashak herself.

Kak’s throat choked up at seeing her. “What happened?” was all he could say.

The little girl seized Omialik’s hand and jumped around and rubbed on him in quite her old, bothersome manner.

“Don’t act so much like a chipmunk. Come. Tell us your story!” He laughed at her mauling, and captured both small hands in one large glove. “What happened after you ran away to play with the hares and marmots?”

“I wanted to go right off where Kak would have a lot of trouble finding me, because he was mean. You were mean, Kak! I ran and ran till I was so tired I lay down—maybe I had a little nap. When I felt rested and thought you had been looking for me long enough I tried to go home; but the sun hid behind clouds and I didn’t know which way was home, and still I kept on going. Then numbers of caribou came feeding near by—more and more and more. It began to grow dark and I cried. That didn’t stop the darkness a bit; so by and by I ceased

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crying and looked around for a bed. There was a nice, low island of rock with three spruce trees growing on it, and smooth ground all covered with moss, and I thought: "That will make me a fine house." With such a lot of animals around I wanted a safe place. I climbed up. It was almost dark and the night grew blacker and blacker for a while; but presently the clouds blew away, and the stars shone and the moon. There was an awful smell and the sound of many animals running. I could see antlers like trees rushing past, and the wolves howled, and——"

"You were scared and howled with them."

"Yes, I did," the child answered boldly. "I cried myself to sleep. When I woke up it was bright day and the whole world was covered with caribou—such lots and lots of caribou, all going in the same direction! There were wolves among them and I was frightened to go into the herd, so I sat still and waited. I was on the island with an ocean of deer rushing by. They kept me on the island. I had nothing to eat but berries, and I cried and hoped you would soon come to find me."

It was so. That day the child had lain alone on the dry, vibrating ground under low clouds, and watched the cold, blue evening fall; while those gray, shadowy, moving legs and tossing, antlered

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heads came on, and on, and on. The thud, thud of running roofs made a strange lullaby. The wind had risen to a sighing moan, and now that night drew in wolves, racing with the herd, howled dismally.

All through the darkness deer continued trotting by, and to the tramp and tremble of their small, innumerable feet Noashak waked a second time.

She felt very lonely and sad as well as hungry, and scarcely thought it worth while to sit up and look at those interminable creatures. Imagine her joy, then, on finding one edge of her rock quite free—luckily for her the edge toward home. This was because the breeze had shifted, making the caribou, which usually travel into the wind, alter their course. Gradually, while the captive slept, the columns had bent westward till the whole, vast herd was swinging down on the far side of her island. The instant she took it in Noashak jumped up and hurried out of prison.

“I’ll never, never again be so naughty as to run away!” the child promised, shaking her head violently; but her seriousness lasted only five seconds.

“What do you think?” she cried, hopping on one foot. “Okak said Indians had carried me off. I wish they had! Then I could have seen their lodges, and I wouldn’t be back till father saved me, and

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killed Jimmie Muskrat; and everybody would still be scared."

"What! Do you like to frighten us, you mischief?"

"Course I do! It's lots of fun. Being away is tiresome; but it's grand getting home! Everybody gives you things—see. Here's Okak's charm against evil." She held up a dried bumblebee hung in a bag on a sinew about her neck. "Mother says I look too much like a fawn and she has promised to make me a coat with bright red trimmings if we can get the ocher at Cape Bexley. Do you hear, Kak? I'm to have a new red coat! It's so I shall never get lost any more. But I'd like to be lost sometimes if I could see all those caribou. Nobody believes I did see them. They say I dreamed it—but I really and truly did."

"Bully for you! Stick to it," Kak cried. "They were real, all right, and you saw them. Don't let the villagers humbug you out of that. We saw them, too, and we killed one and ate it—*that's* proof it was real!"

"Only one, worse luck!" Omialik exclaimed. "But now you are safe, miss, we'll hurry back and lay in some meat. Where is your father?" he asked; for there would be need of all hands to skin and cut up the deer.

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“Dad’s still looking for me, and your Eskimos are with him. I guess they’ll be pretty anxious by now. . . . Oh, I do hope they’ll come here soon so we can start to Cape Bexley—I do want my little red coat!”

CHAPTER X

Homeward Bound

ALL very well to talk so lightly about going to Cape Bexley; when it really came to the point, leaving meant taking leave and this was a bad business. Kak's heart broke, for his friend, Omialik, stayed behind. It was the white man's intention to return down Horton River to Franklin Bay and go from there to Banks Island—a long and dangerous journey into the unknown. The boy burned to accompany him.

"Later on, later on, when your legs are a bit longer for walking," the explorer promised.

Kak tried to smile, tried not to show the hollow feeling this separation planted in the pit of his stomach; but it took moral force. He gulped.

"Brace up, old chap." The Kabluna patted his shoulder. "I'm coming back, you know. You will see me in Victorialand again—unless by then you have gone to Herschel Island to learn to shoot."

Talking about impossible dreams as if they were bound to happen makes them seem jolly real. Kak

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managed to choke back his sorrow, and freshly convinced that life was a grand adventure, ran after the party who were already trekking north.

Crossing the prairies with all their gear and trade goods, the wooden dishes, pails, lamp supports they had made, and pieces of rough wood piled on the sled, proved an entirely different experience from their tiresome, hot, hungry tramp southward. The new sled ran lightly on snow ample to cover the ground and not too heavy for walking. Taptuna was careful to pack a good supply of food, and half-way across the tundra they found their old cache. All laughed heartily to think how much worse they had needed it in the summer than they did now.

With favorable weather and little time lost hunting they made a record trip. Spirits mounted at every mile. Guninana sniffed the ocean air joyfully and said how fine it would be to live in a comfortable snow house, away from buzzing flies and boiling hot sun, and that perpetual sense of work always awaiting them in the woods.

Frost made Kak feel like a war horse. He longed to have the flat ice under his feet again, with two dogs, perhaps three if he was lucky, harnessed to the sleigh, and run—run—run—abandoning himself to that glorious sense of space and motion which was his heritage.

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The first person he hunted up at the cape was Kommana.

"Got that pup for me?" he shouted.

"Got that snow shovel?"

"Sure thing!"

Kak proudly produced their wonderful slab of spruce, and when everybody about had admired and praised it he was offered his choice of the six-months-old dogs.

The boys' fathers were party to this trade, for a single piece of wood the width of the one they had brought was considered very valuable—worth almost as much as Taptuna's new sled.

This was a large village, many Eskimos from the north and east had come to trade, and things took on the character if not the appearance of one of our small-town fairs. Besides their business the traders indulged in sports, jumping and racing and playing football. Their balls are made of soft leather sewed together in sections, much like ours, and are stuffed with caribou hair. The hair of the caribou, being hollow, is very buoyant; this is why the animals float nearly half out of water after they are killed. Their hollow hair is often used in manufacturing life preservers and is considered better than cork. Balls filled solidly with it bounce quite well, and the Eskimos have a lot of fun kicking them about. Kak

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was rather good at games, though, of course, he could not hold his own against men, but Kommana had no use for them.

"You'll be old before you're grown!" Taptuna jollied him. "Come and take a turn at this—just try."

He sent the ball spinning with a good kick-off. Fatty watched but shook his head.

"Ah, leave him be, dad! He's always tired," Kak cried.

He sat down by his friend and was soon telling stories of their southern travels. Kommana wanted to hear all about Jimmie Muskrat, and Selby, and Noashak's adventure with the deer. They talked till nearly dark, and when the younger boy got back to the tent he found his father and Okak in a friendly dispute concerning the best route home.

Taptuna's idea was to go westward, striking across the mouth of the straits for Cape Baring, the southwest corner of Victoria Island, where they would have a very good chance of killing a few polar bears before the hardest frost set in, causing the open water to lie farther and farther offshore, and leaving them to their regular life on the ice catching seals. Okak as usual was raising objections. He still had a quantity of trade goods, and things from their spring cache made the load heavy.

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His neighbor pooh-poohed this, for they might count on smooth going; but Okak was not to be easily moved. He sat, brows knitted, a picture of worry, and tried to think up better objections. Guninana glanced at him once or twice with a merry twinkle in her eye. She knew his trouble—the poor chap was scared stiff about bear-hunting. The woman guessed right, but at that she guessed only half his misery. Either way made Okak tremble in his shoes. For days and days recollection of his cold ducking, with renewed horror of snatching currents and bending ice, had been haunting his memory. He did not forget it would be safer farther west where the water flows more slowly—but what is the use of a safety leading straight into the jaws of nasty, snarling bears? He growled like a bear himself, seeing Tap-tuna wink at his wife.

In her heart of hearts Guninana sympathized with the nervous man. She would have been better pleased to settle down on the ice immediately, even if it meant eating seal and nothing but seal for months; and so she was highly delighted when Okak suddenly burst out:

“Two dogs are not sufficient! With only two men and two dogs the results will be as poor as the hunting is risky, and all our time wasted.”

Nobody answered this for it was sound reasoning.

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The little man sat back rubbing his knees with a that-settles-it sort of superior manner.

"Alunak might join us," Taptuna muttered, annoyed.

"He has promised his wife to go to Franklin Bay and try to meet the Kabluna. She wants some steel needles."

Guninana's speech sounded gently satisfied; Okak observed it and swelled with importance.

"Two dogs——" he began, intending to enlarge on his happy inspiration, but it was just at this moment Kak entered.

"Who said 'two dogs'?" the lively lad cried in a round, booming, out-of-doors voice. "What about Kanik—*my* pup? I'd have you remember we've got three dogs now!"

The resonant words shot like a boomerang through Okak's self-complacence. Instantly he knew the cause lost. He heard it in Guninana's little gasp; read it in his neighbor's sparkling eyes bent on the intruder.

"You think of everything, my boy. I had forgotten Kanik."

Taptuna spoke quietly, but all saw his elation. He felt immensely proud of Kak, and in that the boy's mother must join him. Fresh proof of her son's cleverness always put Guninana into beaming

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good humor; moreover, it is fun to play on the winning side. The family joined forces against Okak and silenced his arguments if not his fears.

They agreed to travel as far as Crocker River with Alunak's party, and this journey turned out harder and slower than anybody had anticipated, for a strong wind from the northwest blew directly in their faces all the way. At the river Okak made a final throw for safety by trying to persuade their friends to join forces in bear-hunting at the eleventh hour. Alunak himself was minded to do so, if it had not been for his wife's fixed idea about needles. He had promised, and the lady being a very dominant person meant to see that he kept his promise. They all got into a great discussion over it, which lasted while they were house-building and eating, and commenced again the next morning. Nothing would turn the woman; Guninana even offered to lend her a needle for as long as they were in Victoria Island, but she held to her point. Perhaps she was as curious to see the Kabluna as to inspect his trade goods; Kak thought so anyway, and blazing with a wild hope suggested they might all go on to Franklin Bay first. When his father answered "No," most emphatically, he grew tired of the merry argument and, deciding to take his dog for a walk, went out alone.

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Kanik leaped up, pawing his master's shoulders, making no end of a fuss and acting silly as a pup does; the pair were perfectly happy till Sapsuk got on to what was afoot and whined, wagging his tail, pleading to be allowed to go. In his present mood the boy thought two a company and three a crowd, so he felt annoyed. Sapsuk might be his favorite, but Kanik was his own—if you have ever possessed a dog you will understand. Kak was so torn between the two that in the end he took neither.

“You have to work hard, and it is better for you to rest,” he admonished like a grandfather, and started off, his walk already half spoiled. “If Sapsuk keeps this up I’ll never be able to teach the pup anything!” the boy muttered fretfully, for the first time wishing his friend had loved him a little less.

Conditions showed that the wind blowing against them all the way along must have been here a heavy, continuous gale. It had piled more ice into the western mouth of the straits than had ever been known before. The coast rose high. From its cliffs Kak beheld great masses of ice filling the whole expanse, rolling away billow on billow like a prairie country, goodness knew how deep under the trackless, gleaming snow.

“Jimminy!” thought the boy. “This old sea is going to take some crossing!”

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He questioned if Omialik had started and felt a pang considering how near his hero might be at that minute and he unable to reach him. Then recollection of Okak brought a grin. "Our neighbor wanted it thick and he's got it—perhaps he'll be sorrier yet we didn't travel by the eastern straits. I wonder what the going really is like out there?"

To think was to act with Kak. He immediately scrambled down the cliffs and a half hour later was walking alone over the corrugated ice field.

It was a shimmering sort of day. The sun struggled to penetrate the clouds, but did not quite emerge. The world lay trackless, formless, shadowless, a vast expanse of gray-white sky and gray-white snow. This kind of light is far harder on the eyes than bright sunshine, and since his snowblindness Kak had been very nervous about eyes. He kept his screwed up, not looking intently at anything, nor paying much attention to where he went, for he counted on the cliffs to guide him back. He only wanted to get a general impression of what their next march would be like and so strolled carelessly up a high ridge for a better view.

All at once Kak felt himself falling. He instantly thrust out his elbows so they would catch on the edges of the ice, for he knew what had happened. Stepping heedlessly he had walked on to the snow

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roof of a crevasse and had gone through into the crack. This is a common form of Arctic accident. The boy expected to stop when he had fallen as far as his waist, and to be able to hoist himself out, none the worse for his adventure; but to his surprise and horror he kept right on falling. The width of this chasm was so great that his elbows did not reach the walls. For an instant Kak felt helplessly angry—then the serious side broke on him. He was falling, falling—where to? On what would he strike—ice or water? How far would he fall? How hard would he strike? Sick with fear he tried to use his frenzied wits. It darted into his mind like a javelin that they would not know at home where he had gone, for snow so hard-driven by the gale was trackless as a rock. How he wished now he had taken either of the dogs, or both! He thought of Omialik, regretting Herschel Island, and in the middle of his keenest sorrow for the young marksman who would never be, both feet hit suddenly, smack on glare ice, flew from under him, and pitched him shoulder on against the solid wall. He slid down, smashing the back of his head, and lay still. Pain mingled with relief. It seemed for a moment as if nothing again could ever be so bad as that falling sensation. But the brief happiness passed. He realized he was lying captive between two high, hard,

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slippery sides, which towered above his head in twilight to the snow roof of the crevasse, offering no way out of that strange, cold prison. Above he could see the jagged hole he had torn in falling, and beyond it the gray sky. Through a fresh tide crack in the ice floor he saw water. Fear gripped him again when he thought how a little less frost would have allowed him to go right splash into it; for when an ice cake cracks it splits from top to bottom, leaving open ocean. Had the storm which roofed the tunnel over brought a spell of warm weather instead of cold, as storms often do, there would have been no floor formed in the crevasse. Bad as his plight was, things might have been infinitely worse. Suppose he had been floundering and freezing now—drowning, down in the bottom of that dismal jail without means of escape or alarm. Again, and this time in a very different mood, he regretted leaving his faithful dog. Sapsuk would have had sufficient intelligence to run and fetch Taptuna.

Kak knew very well nobody would come to help him, so he must help himself. As a beginning he took stock of his condition. One hip and shoulder were badly bruised and painful, and a goose egg was already developing on his head; but no bones seemed to be broken, nor could he find sprains or dislocations. So far so good. His first idea was to cut

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steps in the face of the ice wall and climb out. Putting his hand to his belt he found both knife and sheath had been torn away. "Still, it must be here," the boy said bravely, and commenced looking around. The tide crack mocked him like an open, laughing mouth. "Foxes! If it has gone in there!" he cried, fumbling frantically under the snow which had showered down with his fall. Presently his fingers rapped on a horn handle. He made one grab and almost wept for joy. Just then his knife seemed his salvation; but five minutes later it had lost half of its value. On trial he found the sides were too far apart for him to support himself by a braced arm or knee as he climbed, and walking straight up a perpendicular, slippery surface by toe holes is an utter impossibility.

Kak now understood getting away was going to take all his invention and nerve and strength. The first step was to learn his surroundings. This crack might run smaller or lower at some other point. He set out exploring. It was an eerie sort of business to turn his back on the pool of light striking through the roof hole, and crawl over glare ice, between those blue-white walls, into the very heart of the stupendous jam he had so recently viewed with wonder from the cliffs. On hands and knees the boy began his strange and thrilling tour. His position brought

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him close to the floor, and once beyond the showered snow he saw tracks in the hoarfrost on the ice which made him flinch. He had company in the tunnel. The footsteps went both ways, as if some poor trapped creature had run to and fro, to and fro, in a crazy hunt for freedom. Kak knew very well what tracks these were. Acute dread shuddered over him. "But the crevasse may be long," he comforted himself. "With luck I may get out before we meet."

He crawled for thirty yards, stood up, and tried to guess the height of his prison. The snow roof looked thick and solid here, and though some light filtered through it, and doubtless a little through the ice itself, the gloom was sufficiently thick to confuse calculation. Space seemed to yawn above him; Kak felt rather than saw those walls were higher and wider apart; so he retreated to his first position and, only waiting to take one long look up at the friendly sky, set out in the opposite direction.

There was no question about it, the walls lowered toward this end. Fired with hope our boy scuttled along like a crab. The ice lay perfectly smooth, slippery as a ballroom floor. He crawled a few feet and stopped to glance above, and crawled on, and stopped, till familiarity made him careless. Very soon he was crawling and gazing upward together, forgetful of everything but his anxiety to climb out.

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Then suddenly the advanced arm plunged down splash into another tide crack. Kak uttered a yap of surprise, snatched back his hand, peeled off the wet mitt and dried his fingers quickly on his clothes. It had not gone in above the wrist, but a wet mitt was going to be less comfortable than a dry one; the captive felt vexed at his stupidity, blamed his position for it and scrambling to his feet walked slowly, steadying himself with his right arm against the wall, which bent at a gentle angle. Soon he spied ahead a second pool of light, a second scattering of snow from a hole in the ceiling. For an instant Kak felt glad—misery loves company—then it dawned on him what had fallen through, and his teeth chattered. This snow, packed and trodden down, looked several days old. Would he find a dead thing here entombed with him—or worse, a hungry living thing?

It took all the boy's grit to make him go on. Only the sight of those lowering sides lent him courage. His sole chance for safety might lie hand in hand with this mysterious danger if the beast had elected to live in the small end of the crack. Light was failing again as he moved away from the second hole, and the darkness tortured his trembling nerves. Cautiously the lad stole on. His right hand grasped

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his knife, his left was ready for action; while he seemed to cling to the slippery path by his toes.

On either hand the sides sloped downward. "If it keeps on like this the crack will end in a cave," Kak thought, "a cave with a top of soft snow well within my reach."

Sure enough! He came to another corner, rounded it timidly, and found himself facing the end of the tunnel where the walls ran sharply together, forming a narrow cave. In this cave, filling it completely, stood a full-grown wolf. Its gaunt, gray form was partly shrouded by gray gloom, but the yellow eyes looking out of that triangular face were horribly alive. Kak stopped, choking back fear. He swallowed. His breath caught and came in sobs, turn about. He wanted to fly and was too frightened; so he just stood like a fool, waiting for the famished animal to spring and devour him. The wolf waited also. . . . Little by little, as nothing happened, the boy regained his common sense. Of course the wolf would be scared, poor thing, cornered that way with no means of escape! He saw it was petrified by fear. It looked thin and hungry and was probably weak. Kak felt very sorry for his fellow prisoner, yet he wanted to put distance between them. One never knows the strength and wickedness of a wild animal at bay.

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The two stood regarding each other, neither of them moving. Kak had the advantage—he could retreat. His brain worked madly.

“If I go back to the second hole,” he thought, “and try knocking some more snow down and piling it up against the side of the crevasse, possibly I can climb out there.”

Stealthily he edged away, keeping his eye on the foe till the curve of the wall divided them; then he made tracks as fast as he could over the glare ice.

Standing under the hole broken by the wolf's fall Kak sent his knife flying up against the roof; it fell back amid a tiny shower of snow. He threw it again; a slightly heavier cloud descended. At each throw a little more seemed to come down. The boy was all eagerness; he tossed and tossed and tossed in a fury of excitement till he saw the precious knife suddenly shoot up against the sky. For one terrifying instant it looked as if it would fall outside on top of the crust. His heart stopped beating. He shut his eyes. Hours seemed to pass before the tinkle of copper on ice broke his tension.

“Bears and foxes! How could I have been so careless hopping about that way and never giving a thought!”

Facing a large, ravenous wolf with a knife in one's hand, and facing the same beast unarmed are vastly

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different. This momentary shock made it clear to Kak he was fairly well off, but it jarred his faith in the new scheme. He was afraid now to throw with energy and abandon, and the roof seemed too hardly packed to be broken by half measures. He scraped the loose snow together with his feet, piled it up, patting it hard by hand, stood on it and tried to reach the top. But most of the mound had been lying on the ice floor and was all powdery cold so that it broke under his weight.

"This will take days!" the boy cried in despair. "I'll be hungry and maybe freeze, or perhaps the others will give me up and go away."

His fingers in the wet mitt felt bitterly cold. Taking it off he drew his hand through the loose sleeve of his coat and shirt and cuddled it against his warm body while he stood gazing at the height of those forbidding sides. All the time his glance rested on their inaccessibility his mind was busy reckoning how low they ran in the cave behind the wolf.

"I've got to do it! I've got to do it! I must get out of here before night," wailed Kak. He turned and looked undaunted down the tunnel.

"I've just got to!"

Screwing his courage to the breaking point and grasping his knife more firmly the second prisoner

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crept forward to the angle in the wall. He shoved his head around cautiously. There stood the wolf exactly as Kak had left him. He seemed too frightened even to blink his eyes.

Quite aside from the fear of combat Kak was reluctant to attack this poor caged animal.

"If it only wasn't so narrow there I could shove in and shove him out—given a chance he'd split past me like the wind."

But it was narrow in the cave, much too narrow for any maneuver of that sort.

"I've got to kill him and haul him out! I haven't any choice," cried the boy.

Kak rushed forward with his knife ready and his left arm thrown up in front guarding his face. When the beast reared and hurled itself for a grasp of the enemy's throat its long jaws closed on the shielding wrist. With a gasp of pain the boy flung his arm wide, wrenching the wolf's head clear around, and at the same second stuck his blade deep into the side under its foreleg. Between the double shock of the twist and the blow his victim lost its footing and fell to the ground with a heavy crash, dragging the hunter down on top of him. For a moment Kak rolled amid a convulsed mass of feet and legs, then as the spasm ceased the vise grip on his arm relaxed, and the animal fell limp. Such narrow quarters had



KAK RUSHED FORWARD WITH HIS KNIFE READY.

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offered no chance for a fair fight; it was lunge, grab or be grabbed, and die.

The boy scrambled to his knees, withdrew his knife, dragged the warm body out of the way, and with a shudder sprang from it into the extreme end of the crevasse. For five minutes he worked off his emotion by hacking snow like a madman. It fell around and over him in showers, hiding the bloody trail that oozed across the ice and the spatters from his wounded wrist of which, in his haste to get away, he took no heed.

All at once the roof broke, came down like an avalanche, and the fresh air streamed in. The boy stopped for a deep breath. He could grasp the ice edge with his fingers, but it was still too high for him to pull himself out. He worked swiftly, cutting blocks from the ceiling and piling their fragments against the end of the crack; and all the time it seemed as if that hideous wolf behind was rearing over him, fixed-eyed and open-mouthed.

Kak was pretty tired and unstrung when finally he placed both hands on the crusted snow and drew himself into freedom. How good the air tasted. How heartening was the vast horizon sweep! He ran to warm up, for it had been searchingly cold down in the bottom of that deep ice pit. "Bhooo!" he shivered, nursing his sore arm. Running soon set

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the healthy blood coursing in his veins; his body tingled and his spirits rose.

As soon as his nerves grew normal Kak's point of view changed. He saw the hair-raising experience might be turned into splendid adventure.

"Why not have some honor out of this?" the boy thought. So instead of dashing home all trembling and excited, he held himself down to a steady walk, stopped outside a minute to give old Sapsuk an apologetic little love pat, also for the sake of seeming casual, and then strode in.

"I've killed a wolf, dad," he said. "It's a thin, poor thing, but it will help. See here." And he threw his bloody knife on the floor by way of evidence.

Guninana wasted no time on the weapon; one glance at his sleeve and mitt set her bustling around for rude means of relief. The others cried out in amazement, examined the knife, bombarded him with questions, laughed and clapped like children, quaked and marveled, while Kak wallowed in praise and the show of his mother's attentions. Okak was for going after the carcass at once; but the hunter assured him the meat was safely cached, and burst into laughter at what he called a good joke—then he had to explain. Unable any longer to keep up his hero pose he told the whole story.

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It was an amazing story. Such ice formations are more common in the Antarctic than the north. Everybody flocked over to see the crevasse and help bring the victim home. Taptuna skinned the wolf beautifully; and you may be sure the boy was very careful to pack his trophy next morning, when the parties separated, each going its own way with perfect understanding, and much calling of gay good-bys back and fore.

Our friends were in high spirits. No one really minded the difficulties of rolling ridges and heavy travel. Guninana gloried in her son; Kak was triumphant; Taptuna seemed as proud of his new sled as Noashak of her coat with red trimmings. And Okak had enough trade goods to make him a well-to-do man.

Their summer trip had prospered through strenuous labor and thrilling feats, and they all looked forward to their winter on the ice as a well-earned holiday.

Date Due

MAR 29 1976

CAT. NO 73 233

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0 1164 0049235 5

PS3537 .T29K3

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